THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

ARGOSY

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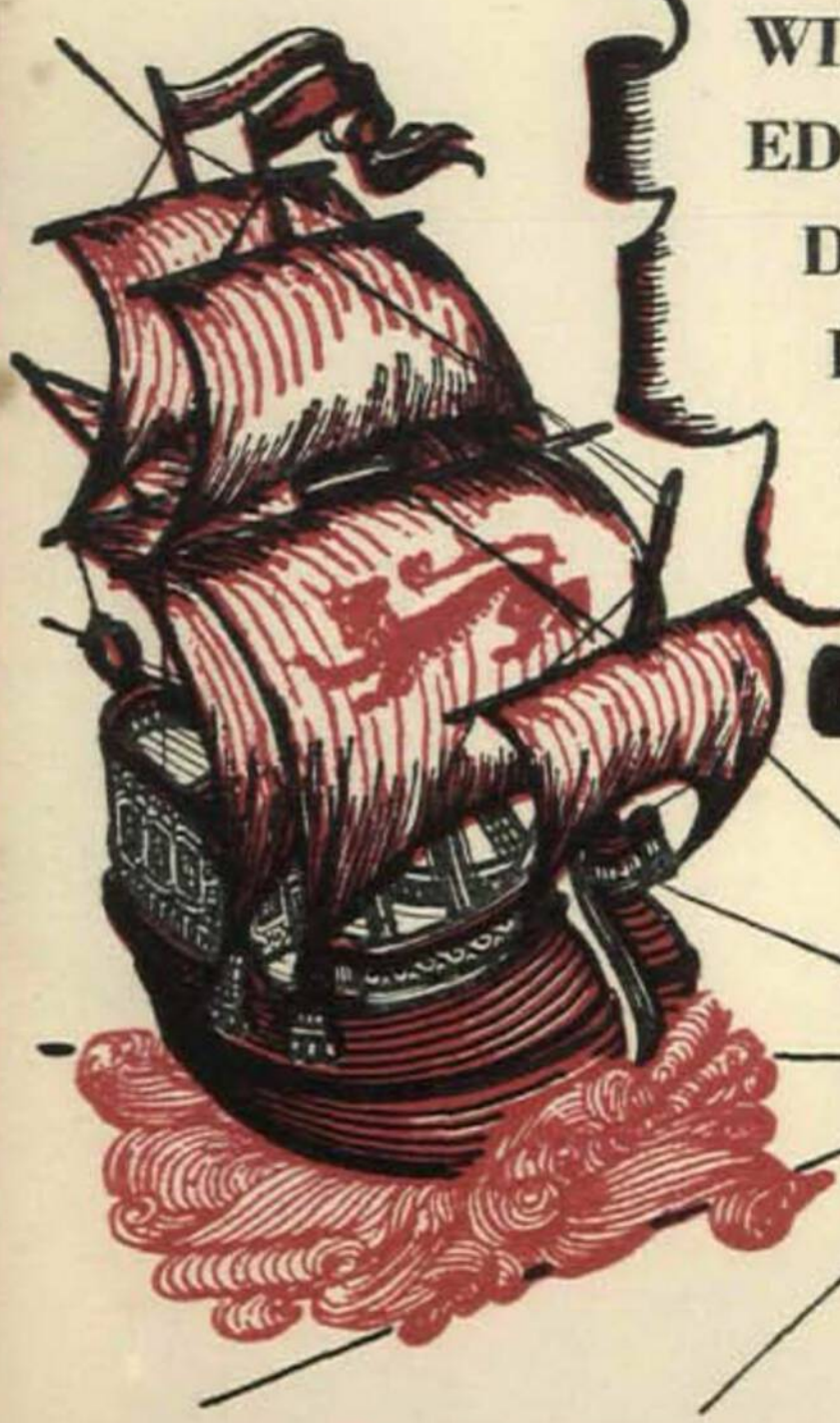

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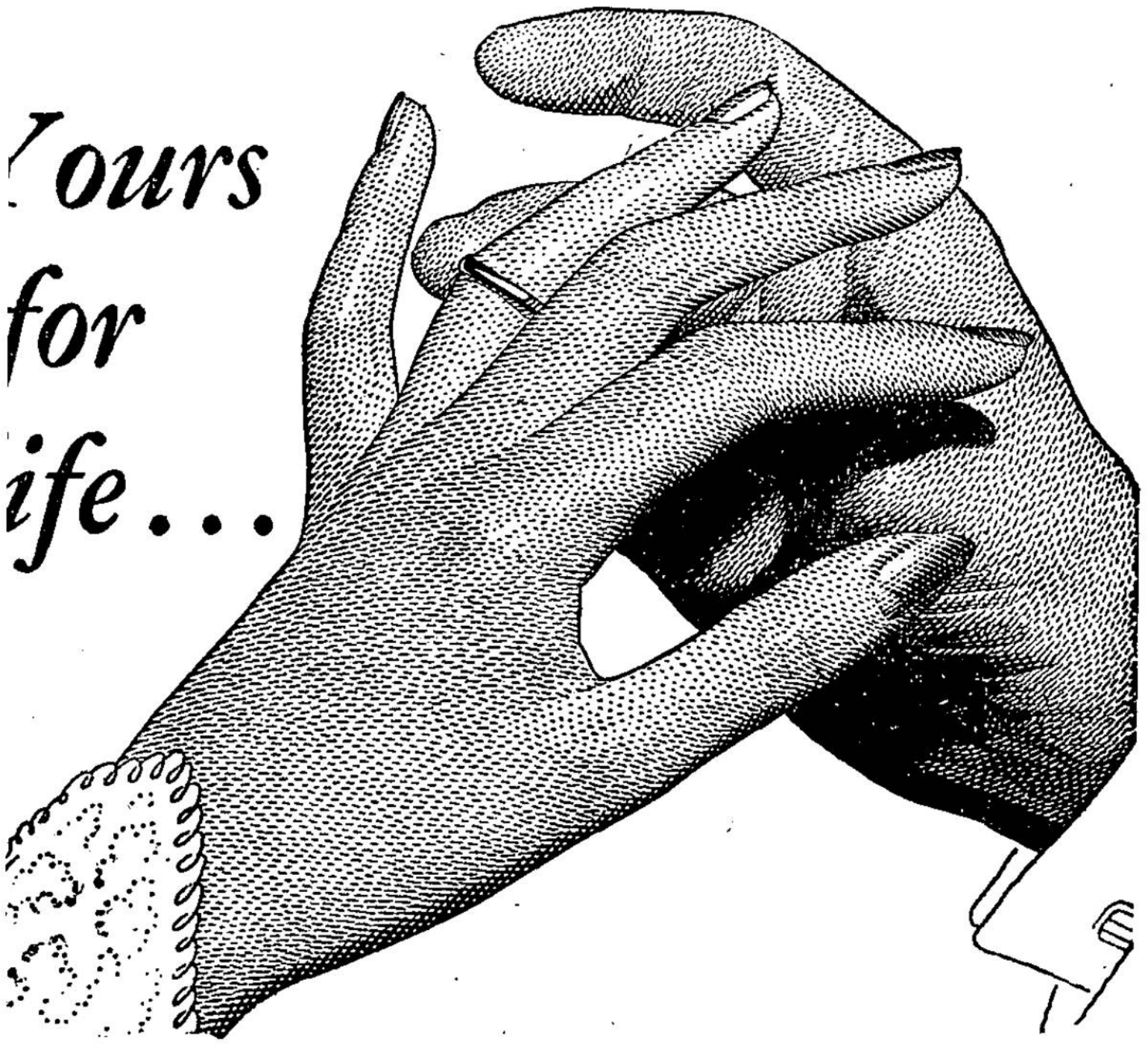

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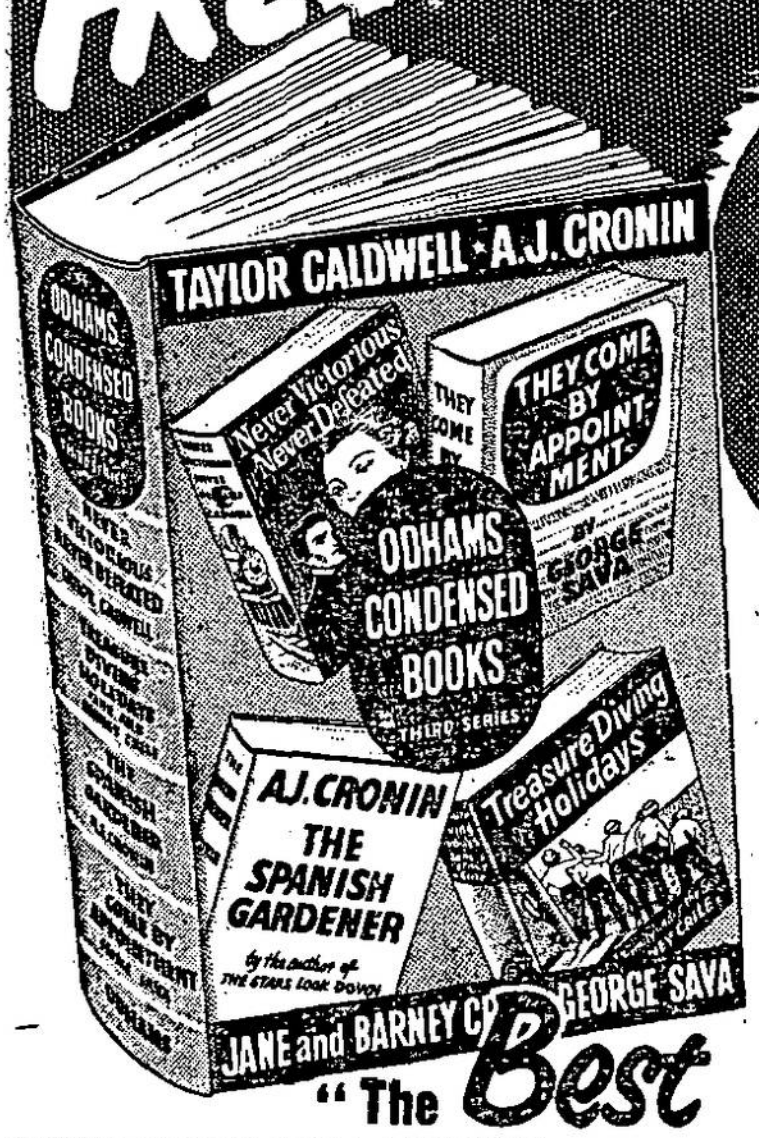

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ARGOSY

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White Fire

Awakening I hear
Morning's sunlit clear
Larksong lace the sky
With laughing minstrelsy.

And in the song-live lane
Above the tits' refrain
While willow catkins shake
Green lanterns in the brake
Again and yet again
Chime the cold cuckoo bells.

On craggy fells
Gorse lights a golden fire
And the young heather spins
Its first white spire
Among the whins.

In raiment of delight
Drenching with golden light
The land laughs to the sky;
Hawthorn and cherry now
With joy in every bough
Their white Hosannahs cry.

JOHN BARRON MAYS

A Mouse in the House

Perched on top of the table, Cathy said "This is no place for us"

by RICHARD MEALAND

I WAS driving along the parkway from New York, keeping a steady eighty and not paying much attention to the snowy landscape beyond the windows, when the phone light flashed yellow on the dashboard. I flicked the switch. "Yes?"

"Simon?" It was Cathy speaking from home. "Where are you?"

"On the parkway." With rush-hour traffic so heavy in the air over New York these days, I'd gone back to driving to and from work. We hardly used the new rocket, except at weekends.

"I'm just about to go through the Greenwich toll," I said.

"Well, your crazy house won't turn. Something's wrong."

"Cathy, it's not a crazy house, and it's yours as much as mine. What's the matter?"

"I don't know. I ski-ed down to the village and when I came back to plan dinner, the kitchen was still facing east. There's a beautiful sunset, too."

"Well, go in the living-room and look at it there. What about the solarstat? did you set it?"

"You set it yourself this morning at breakfast, remember? But the house hasn't moved all day."

"O.K. I'll see what's wrong when I get there. How's the ski-ing?"

"Wonderful. But the tow isn't working. You'll have to fix that too."

"Oh, for heaven's sake! what did you do to it?"

"I didn't do anything. I don't know why you're always blaming me when things go wrong. I just look at one of your gadgets, and it comes to a dead stop!"

"Maybe it's frozen. Temperature here is five above. What is it there?"

I could hear her walking over to the window and I flicked

another switch to light up the viewing-panel. This was against the driving-code, but I wanted to see how she looked. She was still in ski pants and boots, though she'd taken off her parka. Leaning over to peer at the outdoor thermometer, she made a pretty picture.

"It's zero," she said, turning around and switching on the scanner so she could see me, too. "Exactly zero. Maybe that's why the house is stuck."

The scanner always makes me nervous. "I'll be there in twenty minutes," I said, "and I'll take a look at it."

I turned off the screen and the phone and passed inspection at the toll gate. Then I stepped up the speed to eighty-five till I had to slow down for the long turn onto Route 7. This is not a heated pavement, but it was still wet from the chemical sprayed on it and there was no ice.

At New Milford I took the bypass and turned off six miles farther along to cross the old concrete bridge. Before I dropped down into the white-mantled valley, I could see our house shining in the pink sunset over on the next hill.

The house was a beauty—like a glistening steel helmet against the haze that bathed the snow and the bare trees. I'd put a lot of work into the place, and except for my grandfather's abandoned house farther back in the woods and the land itself, everything was new, inside and out.

From the ridge I couldn't tell whether the house had turned or not. Normally, in the winter, Cathy liked to have the solarstat set at automatic, with the living-room following the sun all day. At night I usually switched it off entirely, unless we wanted the moonlight in our bedroom. Then in the morning I would set it at automatic so that the house rode by itself, or on manual so that we could have any view we liked and any amount of sun. The turning device had never gone wrong before.

Women! I thought. They like the comfort of mechanical things, but let one little gadget go wrong, and they blow up every time.

When I drove up, I saw Cathy was right. The house was in the same position I'd left it in that morning. I parked the car under the rocket in the hangar and ran from the hangar to the house, feeling the bite of zero cold in my thin city suit. Actually, the weather bureau needn't have given us quite so much snow, seeding the clouds so early in December. Now when we got a genuine north-easter, they blamed Canada for not regulating it.

Cathy was waiting for me in the plexiglass storm-door, and she threw her arms around me before I had a chance to dry my feet at the warming-grille.

"While you were about it," she said, "you might have heated a path from the hangar to the house."

"What's a little chill," I said, "when I have you to warm me up?"

The house looked wonderful as usual as we stepped through the sealing-beam in the portal. I stood there for a moment, letting the rays disinfect me as I glanced around. There was not a thing in this house that hadn't been planned for beauty as well as for utility. The only concession to the past was the fireplace in the pie-shaped living-room. Cathy had insisted on the fireplace, but we seldom used it.

Otherwise, everything was automatic, germproof, soundproof, dust-free, air-conditioned—a functional beautiful shell that floated free of the ground around a central pillar.. In a sunken chamber beneath the house was the all-purpose power-room with insulated ducts and wires feeding up through the pillar and running underground to the hangar.

I now recognized one trouble. The shaft that connected the storage-room off the kitchen to the power-room below could be used only when the rooms were in alignment. The way the house now faced, the shaft was not aligned, and I'd have to use the emergency outdoor entrance to get at the trouble underground.

"Why don't you send for the engineer?" Cathy suggested. "He'll know what's wrong."

"I want to take a look at it first," I told her. I put on some warm clothes and went out.

Circling the house through the settled drifts of snow, I enjoyed momentarily the bitter wind that blew from the north. The sky had turned completely dark, I noticed. There were no stars at all. I had to kick away two feet of drift to open the power-room door.

Once inside, I went down the stairs and was soon warm again. The Geiger counter was ticking smoothly, showing a steady fission in the pile. I walked back through the tunnel to the turntable mechanism, but I couldn't see a thing wrong. Finally I followed the feeder lines to the pile, and shoved in the neutralizer to stop the fission while I worked on the lines. There would be enough stored power in the batteries to last for some hours.

Cathy called me on the intercom after about half an hour. "What are you doing down there? It's snowing and I'm hungry. Can I put dinner on?"

"Haven't found the trouble yet. Go ahead with dinner—I'll be right up."

In a few minutes I pushed my way out into the new snow that was beginning to pile up outside. When I reached the sliding door of the storm bubble, I was gasping and panting.

"Wow, what a night! I didn't know there was going to be a storm."

Laughing, Cathy took my parka. "The weather bureau didn't, either. They were predicting it for northern New England. What about the turning thing? Did you fix it?"

"Not yet. But it can safely wait till tomorrow. With this storm, we won't want to be turning anyway."

We had dinner. Cathy had cooked the chicken four minutes instead of three, so it was a beautiful crackling brown. Afterwards, we decided against TV and instead went into the study and worked on our monthly accounts. Cathy has no head for figures but she has a nice head to curl on my shoulder while I work.

After we had fed the data into the machine, we turned off all the inside lighting and illuminated the outdoors. We couldn't see much, however, through the heavy pall of snow.

"I should have left the snow spray in the storage-room instead of in the hangar," I said. "Now I'll have to wade through that stuff in the morning. Haven't we an old shovel or something?"

"Whatever for?" Cathy said. Then, "What was that?"

We both heard it—a tiny scratching sound coming from the fireplace. I turned the floodlights off and the house lights on, and as I did so, something darted out from under the dry logs and raced along the wall to the dining-room door.

"Simon!" Cathy exclaimed in horror, "that was a mouse!"

"A mouse?" It seemed incredible, but it was true. "How in the world did he get in?"

"I don't know, but you'd better get him out of here. He went into the dining-room." Cathy backed up against the dark glass wall as if the mouse was about to attack her. "Hurry, Simon! do something!"

"Now, wait a minute. It's only a mouse. He must have slipped in before the cold weather came."

"I don't care. Get him out!"

I started towards the dining-room, while Cathy piled into a chair and pulled her feet up. I looked everywhere. No mouse. Then he unexpectedly ran past me, scrambled for a corner, and disappeared behind Cathy's chair in the direction of the fireplace.

This time Cathy screamed. "There he goes! Back in the fireplace. Get him, Simon!"

But he had vanished behind the logs.

I studied the situation. Just how did one go about catching a mouse? "I'll never catch him with my bare hands," I said. "There must be something . . ."

"We have a thousand gadgets in this house, and not one single thing that will get rid of a mouse!" The derision in Cathy's voice was enormous.

"Now, let me think . . ."

"And by the way," Cathy said, "what's the matter with this place? I'm getting cold."

"Cold? *I'm* not cold."

"You've been running about. But *I'm* cold."

I went over and looked at the thermostat. Sure enough. The temperature was down to 55° though the control was set at 68°.

With a wary eye on the fireplace, Cathy got out of her chair. "I told you to send for the engineer."

Now *I* noticed the cold. There was something wrong with the lights, too. They weren't as bright as usual. I glanced at the thermostat again. The red line had fallen half a degree.

I tried to remember what I might have done or left undone in the power-room. What about the television and the telecom? Were they off, too?

I turned the dials and got a fading image on the screen. It became fainter as I watched. I picked up the telecom to call outside, but the tone was definitely low. I dialled for the power engineer and heard him answer. But by the time I yelled my name and address and told him to come right over, the instrument was dead. I didn't know whether he had heard me.

Cathy was shouting at me, "The lights are going out!" And I forgot the mouse entirely.

I went back to the storage-room for my portable phone and some torches, and a dozen disastrous consequences of power failure occurred to me.

The air in the house was already beginning to get stale, and we'd have to open a vent with the blizzard raging outside. The water would be off, and that would affect the taps, humidifiers, and toilets. The germicidal beams, the electric blankets, the rechargers for portable equipment—my portable phone was dead—the driveway heater, and all communications, food freezers, thermal cookers—everything would fail. Had already failed!

I'd have to go down and find out what was wrong in the power-room or we'd spend the night at the mercy of the storm.

Cathy had already put on her ski clothes, and I tried to find mine in the dark. "If I can't fix the thing right away," I said, "you'll have to open a vent. You have to have air."

"I'll freeze to death."

"Nonsense. Your ski clothes are adequate, and I'll light a fire for you in the fireplace."

"*The mouse is in the fireplace.*"

"Oh, forget the mouse!" I stormed into the living-room and applied my pocket lighter to the impregnated logs in the grate.

Cathy came running after me just as the logs burst into flame. "Oh no," she cried, "don't burn him!"

He wasn't burnt, only singed. He shot out from under the grate and sat there blinking dazedly in the beam of my torch. Before I could move, he darted away in the dark, and I knew I'd never catch him.

"I'm going to the power-room," I said to Cathy. "I'll find out what's wrong."

"I'm going with you," she said. "I won't stay alone with that mouse."

The blizzard howled mightily as we stepped out through the storm-doors. Cathy grabbed the back of my coat and held tight. It was only by keeping one hand firmly on the weather guard that I was able to make any progress. I don't know how long it took us to gain the door, and I had to move quantities of snow before we could get in.

One flash of the torch, and I saw what the trouble was. I had forgotten to pull out the neutralizing-rod that controlled the fission pile. The storage batteries had gradually become exhausted, and our little domestic world had gone to pot.

I pulled the rod to the required length and held my breath. Almost immediately the Geiger counter started clicking and soon it was humming merrily. But nothing else happened. The indicators for the various mechanisms should have swung into position, but the room remained dark, the needles motionless, and I realized with panic that something was still wrong. What, I didn't know. While Cathy held the torch for me, I checked everything, working with feverish haste.

"Why didn't *you* call the engineer when you found the house wouldn't turn?" I asked Cathy peevishly.

"How did I know you hadn't shut it off for some reason?"

"Why should *I* shut it off?" I demanded. "It's for your benefit."

"For *my* benefit?" Her voice held contempt. "What do I care whether the house turns or not? What difference does it make to me?"

I sat down on a bench. "But I thought you liked it. You said it was fun to have a house that turned."

"Of course I did. But I didn't say I *wanted* a house that turned. That was your idea. I just wanted a place in the country. *You* decided what kind of place it would be."

I was dumbfounded. "Don't you like the house?"

"It's all right, but . . . Oh, forget it. What are we going to do now?"

"I want to know why you don't like the house." I held the torch close to her face, but she turned her head away.

"Please, Simon. We can discuss it later."

"I want to know what's wrong."

"There's nothing wrong. It's—Oh, I'm just bored to death, that's all. Come on. Let's go out in the storm. Let's enjoy it."

"Are you crazy? That storm's a killer, and everything's gone phut with the works down here!"

Cathy started to cry. "That's just the trouble. One thing goes wrong, and we fold up like a couple of ants under an insect gun. There's nothing we can do—because most of the time we don't have anything to do. Why do you suppose I go shopping and visiting the neighbours all day? Just to have something to do. Anything to get *out* of this house."

I turned the torch towards the floor. Here I'd planned a house that practically eliminated housework—there wasn't a new invention I'd overlooked. And here was Cathy going into hysterics because she had nothing to do.

I was angry with her and angry with myself, and on top of that we couldn't stay in the power-room any longer with the air-conditioner not working. We'd have to go back to the house, open a vent, and try to keep warm by the fireplace. Even the extra wood was out in the hangar, I remembered. But I was glad at that moment that Cathy had insisted on a fireplace in the house.

"Cathy," I said, "if you want something to do, I'd appreciate it if you went back to the house you hate so much and stayed there while I see if I can get help."

I handed her one of the torches and marched her up the stairs. She went, protesting.

At the top of the stairs, she said, "Simon, you're not going to try to get to the Newtons?"

The Newtons were our nearest neighbours—a mile away. I hadn't thought of them before, but I pretended I had. "That's right."

"You'll never make it. You'll get lost in the storm."

I thrust the door open and held it against the wind till she got out. Cathy grabbed my coat again, and we retraced our steps to the house and round to the entrance. I got the panel open

and made her go inside. She probably thought I was an utter fool, but she didn't say a word.

I was an utter fool. I turned away and started floundering through the snow. In two minutes I knew I'd never even find the hangar except by sheer accident, much less be able to bring more than a stick or two of wood back.

Some men in desperate straits are supposed to develop remarkable powers of strength and ingenuity. But I was not one of them. Fifteen minutes after I set out for the hangar, I gave up completely and turned back.

I finally reached the house, and once I was inside, with the panel shut behind me, I simply flopped on the warming-grille in exhaustion. I heard Cathy's voice talking to someone, but I paid no attention. But when I had recovered a little from my frozen lethargy, my curiosity got the better of me. I got up, crossed the hall, and peered into the living-room.

Cathy had pulled out a table in front of the fire and was perched on it, Indian fashion, with blankets wrapped around her.

"I don't mind a little dust," she was saying. "I like it, just as you do. It's something to fight against. I like cooking and cleaning and any kind of real housework. If he'd only let me take over his grandfather's house, you and I could move in, and he could stay here. But it's a losing battle. We might as well give up, you and I. There's no place for either of us in this world."

"Cathy!" She turned and almost fell off the table.

"Whom are you talking to?" I demanded.

"The mouse. See him? He and I are keeping warm."

I went over and took her in my arms. I guess it was my turn to be a little hysterical, because I kissed her and held her and kissed her again. I said anything that came into my head. I was so glad to get back to her and to the warmth of a homely fire.

"Cathy, dearest, why didn't you say something earlier about grandfather's house? It's so old—everything in it is old . . ."

"But I've always liked it," she said. "It's old, but it's good. It's a home. I told you long ago we ought to use it, but you wanted this—this mechanical brain. This house takes a woman away from what she wants to do—what women have been doing for thousands of years—making a home. I told you, I haven't anything to do."

I began to see what she meant. Men also need something to do in the field of their traditional activities like—well, like chopping wood.

I lifted Cathy to the floor and started to break off the table legs.

"Too bad there's so much metal in this house," I said. "Still, we'll have enough wood for tonight. There's your father's old TV cabinet in the store-room and my desk in the hall. If we're going to move into grandfather's house, we'll let the new tenants furnish this one. But let me warn you, Cathy," I shook a table leg under her nose, "in grandfather's house there are going to be mice. I hope you realize that."

She threw her arms round my neck and kissed me. "Oh Simon—what do I care? I'm beginning to like mice."

The power engineer came the next morning as soon as our road was cleared. He went down into the power-room and found that I'd forgotten to throw the main switch after pulling out the rod.

It was as simple as that.

As for the turntable trouble, that was caused by a short circuit. Something—probably a mouse, he said—had gnawed the insulation off one of the wires.

But I didn't really care. In grandfather's house we were going to have mousetraps.

★ ★ ★

MALE ORDER

. . . Etiquette demanded suitable leaving ceremonies, including the prospect of one which filled even William with apprehension: the Maharajah's own brand of drinking-party. Ranjit prided himself on a special wine, which was an extract of raisins mixed with a quantity of pearls ground to powder. As he always insisted on helping his guests himself, it was not easy to avoid excess without offending him.

By great good fortune Ranjit was not well enough to indulge in the promised debauch, and William went for a farewell ride with him instead.

As usual, Ranjit poured out questions. Was Lord Auckland married? Why not?

Was William married? Why not?

"I can't afford it," said William.

"Are English wives very expensive? I wanted one myself some time ago, and wrote to Government about it, but they did not send me one."

JANET DUNBAR,
Golden Interlude

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Girl at the Bar

by WILLIAM SAROYAN

WHEN a writer wants to write a story but hasn't got an idea in his whole head he's in trouble.

I'm a writer who wants to write a short story, but I haven't got an idea in my head, which is certainly whole. I've got a lot of ideas in my head in favour of *not* writing a short story, but I've *got* to write one because there's a girl I met last night who asked me to write a story about *her*, and I said I would.

"All right," she said. "I'll see you here tomorrow at midnight, and you can let me have the story."

"O.K.," I said.

Her name's Roxanna. I met her at the Carousel on the Old Barbary Coast in San Francisco. I went in there last night for a bottle of beer after I'd finished a new story. She was sitting at the bar drinking beer and reading a book. I thought she was a schoolteacher, and who wants to look at a schoolteacher in a place like that? Not me.

In one glance I noticed the serious face, the clear eyes, the high forehead, and then I watched the girl who was dancing on the floor, but I didn't notice very much about her eyes or anything like that. I couldn't help noticing that she didn't have any clothes on, though, because when a girl is dancing without any clothes on you just can't help noticing that she hasn't got any on.

I felt happy about having just finished a new story in only one week, which is pretty good time for me, because I write slowly. It took me six months to write *Hurrah for Heaven*, for instance, which is my only novel.

It's about San Francisco, which the fellow in the story thinks is heaven because the minute he arrives in San Francisco from Bakersfield all kinds of wonderful and funny things happen to him. Every once in a while he thinks he must have died and gone to heaven, but it always turns out that he is still alive and everything is real.

Scribner's published the novel in 1950 when I was twenty-four

and a year out of the Army. The price was two dollars fifty but I didn't buy a copy because in my contract Scribner's agreed to send six copies free, which they later did.

When I got back from Korea early in 1950 I went straight home to Bakersfield and started to write my war memoirs, but they just weren't as good as Churchill's or Eisenhower's. I got discouraged and started to read. I mean, I read night and day. My mother told my father, and they got worried and sent me to San Francisco for a holiday. I never went back to Bakersfield, so once a year they come to San Francisco to visit me.

The critics said *Hurrah for Heaven* was a novel by a new writer who ought to be watched. It went over pretty good for a first novel. Almost five thousand copies were sold, and then it was brought out in a paper-back edition that cost only twenty-five cents. I bought a copy of that edition because I saw it on a rack in a drugstore.

It was the same story, word for word, only the picture on the cover showed a pretty girl in a bathing-suit, walking across a battlefield towards a soldier leaning against a jeep, waiting for her. The publishers of the paper-back book got the idea for that picture out of the last half of one sentence in the whole book, where the fellow remembers how he used to think about pretty American girls whenever he wasn't too busy thinking about something else, like not getting killed, for instance.

I felt like drinking beer last night at the Carousel, being a writer to watch, with a new story just finished and on its way to New York, and no more Army or war for me ever again.

The dancing girl came to the end of her dance, but nobody in the whole place applauded, except me. I believe in applause. Of course there weren't many people *in* the place, just a few fellows in uniform, and a few more out, but not one of them applauded, not even the fellows in uniform. I guess they haven't been in a shooting war yet.

The girl at the bar that I thought was a schoolteacher turned to see who was applauding, and of course it was me, Melvin O. Morley. She seemed surprised that it *was* me. I don't know who she expected it to be, though.

She smiled a little and I smiled back, and then she looked at the girl who was taking a bow, and then she put her book face-down on the bar and said to the bar-tender, "Watch my book, will you, Johnny?"

The bar-tender nodded, and the girl went away.

The bar-tender noticed the empty bottle in front of me and he said, "Another?"

And I said, "Yes, thank you." And he went to get another.

The man on the stage was telling jokes now and the boys at the tables were saying things back to him and he was laughing and saying things back to them. None of it was funny, though, so I looked away and noticed that the picture on the cover of the paper-back book on the bar was a picture of a girl in a bathing-suit, but almost every paper-back book has a picture like that on the cover, so I didn't think anything of it.

The man on the stage introduced the next dancer and asked everybody to bring her on with a little applause. He applauded and I applauded, but that's all. A lot of people just don't applaud anything.

The next dancer was the most beautiful girl anybody could ever hope to see anywhere in the whole world. The beer tasted great, the music of the three-piece band was funny and kind of sad, too, and the girl danced, and every now and then I looked back at the book on the bar. All of a sudden I saw that it was my book, *Hurrah for Heaven.* Quite a thrill.

The girl on the stage came to the end of her dance, and again I was the only one in the place who applauded. The man told some more jokes and kidded around with the boys at the tables some more, and then another girl came on to dance. The school-teacher came back to the bar and sat down and started to read *Hurrah for Heaven* again.

I didn't say I wrote *Hurrah for Heaven* because I didn't know how to find an excuse to say a thing like that. Pretty soon, though, Johnny the bar-tender got interested in the book, too.

"What you reading?" he said.

"Book," the girl said.

"What about?"

"Fellow comes to San Francisco and thinks it's heaven."

"How come?"

"I don't know. Just does."

"Do you *like* to read books?" Johnny said.

"Of course," the girl said. "Don't *you*?"

"Sometimes. What is it, a mystery?"

"Oh no. Just good writing."

"What do you mean?"

"Well," the girl said, "*this* is good writing." And then she read a paragraph out of the book, where the fellow's walking along the Embarcadero and thinks he's in heaven.

"Not bad," Johnny said. "Kind of crazy, though, isn't it?"

"I don't think so," the girl said, and then she read another paragraph. When she stopped reading I recited the words of the following paragraph. I must have written that paragraph a hundred times, so of course I knew it by heart.

Well, when I came to the end of the paragraph the girl said, "Have *you* read this book?"

"I wrote it," I said.

"You did not!" the girl said.

"I did, too."

"What's your name?"

"Melvin O. Morley. What's yours?"

"Roxanna . . . Are you sure?"

"Sure, I'm sure," I said.

"Well, what are *you* doing in this place?"

"Drinking beer and watching the show. What are *you*?"

"I work here."

"What do you do?"

"Dance."

"You?"

"Yes, of course."

"I thought you were a schoolteacher."

"No, I'm a dancer, the same as all the other girls here."

"When are you going to dance?"

"I just did."

"Was that *you*?"

"Yes, of course. Why?"

"I thought it was somebody else. You look different here at the bar."

"I *am* different here at the bar."

It wasn't easy to believe that the girl I had seen dancing and the girl at the bar were the same girl, but they were.

"How did you ever happen to write a book like this?" the girl said.

"Because I'm a writer," I told her.

We talked this way until it was time for her to dance again, and then it was five minutes to two. The show was over, and I had had six bottles of beer, instead of one, like I'd planned. Roxanna came to the bar and asked me to write a story about her, and I said I would. She went out into Pacific Street and got into a taxi, and I started walking home, because I like to walk whenever I can.

And that's where the matter stands.

Only, I haven't got an idea in my whole head. I'm going to write a story for Roxanna just the same, because I said I would and when I say I'm going to do something, even if I happen to be drunk at the time, I do it. I've got to write swiftly, though. I'm due at the Carousel in an hour and a half, and it takes me an hour and a half to walk there.

Now, there are several kinds of short stories: one kind, like the

kind I wrote last week, is anywhere from three to ten thousand words in length. Another kind is under two thousand words in length. It's called a *short* short story.

I've got to invent a new kind, a *short short* short story, like this, I guess:

Roxanna, whoever you are, I love you, whatever that means, and I mean it. Melvin.

I hope she likes it, because if she does, there's no telling what'll come of it, and I'll be eager to find out—more of heaven, most likely, to which I am always saying hurrah, because I believe in applause. More of the same wonderful stuff that has been happening to me in San Francisco every day for three years. More accidents and surprises, more jokes and laughter, more fun.

If she *doesn't* like it, though, I'll know we weren't meant for each other, except to meet at a bar, and that's a good thing for a young writer to know, too; and I'll still have heaven, anyhow, and all the time in the world.

★ ***William Saroyan lives at Malibu, California, started to write when he was thirteen. Now author of more than thirty books and plays, he refused the $1,000 Pulitzer Prize for drama which he was awarded in 1939 for "The Time of Your Life" because he "already had $1,000 at the time, and because commerce has no right to patronize art." The Drama Critics' Circle Award for the same play was more to his taste: there was no money involved and he "knew some of the critics and wanted to meet the others at the free dinner."***

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Servants discuss People

At all cost, she must hear what was said

by J. D. SCOTT

AS Mrs. Malverley brought the long sharp pencil of lipstick into contact with her full soft upper lip, a car backfired in the street, and suddenly a violent red smear, like a wound, ran from the corner of her mouth to her cheekbone. She looked at it in dismay which took some moments to fade; the noise like a shot, and instantly the mark on her face—it was almost as though she *had* been wounded.

The tremors of nerves, which had been rippling out from the middle of her stomach every half-hour or so throughout the afternoon, suddenly became continuous, and she found that she was shaking. She thought of the tray of drinks standing by the shaded window in the drawing-room, so hospitable, so lavish, the large eighteenth-century silver tray so sound an investment in elegance, and despite the elegance she would have liked to go through and swig some gin from the bottle all crude and warm from the heat of the day.

But that would not do. Malcolm, when he arrived, would want her to drink even with him, more or less, so as to give his own drinking the illusion of being merely social. And tonight —Mrs. Malverley's stomach gave a nasty little lurch—tonight she must be of a discretion, but of a *discretion*—

Mrs. Malverley had met Malcolm Holderness about nine months before, at a small dinner party given by a neighbour in Chelsea. When she had been invited the information had been conveyed to her, in a very nice discreet manner, that he was a recent widower, that he had two children, and that he was a successful barrister; so that from the beginning, from the moment when he had come into the room and been introduced, there had been this thing about their relationship, this match-maker's suitability.

They had taken to one another at once.

Mrs. Malverley had been impressed by the heavy, clever face, which gained colour and also seemed to untwist when Malcolm had quickly and unobtrusively drunk the cocktails quickly

and unobtrusively supplied by their host. She had felt her own charm, her own intelligence, gleam and glow in response to his attention and his conversation; she had admired the skill with which, later in the evening, he had elicited, without appearing to do so, the fact that she herself was a widow—a war-widow—and childless. She had gone home to await his telephone call.

Now, leaving her face and thinking about the telephone call and its consequences, she lay down upon the bed and began to relax, conscientiously repeating to herself the ritual words, shoulders opening out like wings, back falling through the bed onto the floor, and by the time she unhitched her jaw, she lay deliquescent and at ease.

Since she had received the telephone call everything had gone like clockwork. Theatres, dinners, once or twice, at the beginning, night clubs—but that had soon stopped—and once she had sat in court and heard him cross-examining, and at one point the judge had looked up sharply and begun to write quickly and Malcolm's junior had smiled, and Malcolm explained afterwards that he thought he had won the case at that point.

Malcolm, she now felt certain, would not arrive for another hour. Already during the afternoon he had postponed his arrival three times, twice by messages sent from his chambers in the Middle Temple through his clerk, and finally by a hurried word or two in his own voice on the telephone. He had originally proposed to come and take luncheon with her, but although she had prepared salmon mayonnaise and put a bottle of Johannisberger in the refrigerator, she had not really expected him.

Malcolm had never, since she had met him, taken a Saturday afternoon off. Even when they dined together during the week he generally went home to work again by eleven o'clock. That is, unless he started drinking seriously, in which case the routine was that he became unconscious on her sofa about midnight. Although she had often been tempted, Mrs. Malverley had never tried to get him to cut down either his overwork or his drinking.

There were a number of reasons for this. For one thing she was genuinely tolerant; it seemed to her that she did not run her own life with such outstanding success as to justify her attempting to run someone else's. If, of course, Malcolm were to marry her, that would provide the success, and with it perhaps the justification.

Her own eagerness for this marriage made her apprehensive. When her husband had been killed, he had left her the house and very little else. She had returned, without extreme reluctance, to her work as a masseuse, which her competence and social ease made quite lucrative, but of course there were no

more race meetings or holidays at Cap d'Antibes, or really good clothes, and in the course of her widowhood she had come to hate her life with a helpless bitter hate.

And now, perhaps, a new marriage. During the last two months especially it had been getting much nearer. They were neither of them in love, but they liked one another, admired one another, suited one another. Recently they had got over one of the great hurdles of an English courtship. It had presented itself in the form of the silver tray in the drawing-room.

"Oh God," Malcolm had said,—he had been pouring out drinks—"my cigarette's rolled on to the family crest and made a burn on it." He laughed, rather drunkenly. He had wonderful control but sometimes, when he was with her, he relaxed it.

"It'll come out when it's polished. Anyway it's not a family crest. Neither my family nor Chris's ran to one."

"Really?" He laughed again. "It's been impressing me for months."

"My father was a chemist in Worcester."

"One up on me. Mine was a contractor in Lancashire. Eventually, that is. He began life as a carter. That always had to be hidden from Delia's parents."

After this there was an added ease between Catherine and Malcolm.

Thinking of this ease, Catherine rose to her feet, repaired the damage on her cheek, completed her make-up, and went down to the drawing-room without any nervousness at all. Her anxiety about meeting Malcolm's children had been disproportionate and foolish. Of course she would get on with them: why not? An eleven-year-old girl and an eight-year-old boy could not be very formidable. It was only this queer, disagreeable sense of being on approval.

His feeling for his children was some unplumbable depth in Malcolm's character. Since they were both away at boarding-school in term-time, and spent most of their holidays with their maternal grandparents in Ireland, he did not see much of them. Nor did he talk about them much; he referred to them as "the brats" in a dismissive tone. Only he had some link with them, subterranean, powerful and mysterious, which Catherine distrusted and feared.

She heard Malcolm letting himself into the house. When he came into the drawing-room she was a little shocked by the sight of his face; the white twisted look of overwork was more marked than she had ever seen it. She handed him a half-tumbler of whisky and soda while offering her cheek to be kissed.

"Sorry I'm late." His fine barrister's voice had a touch of

breeziness which she had learnt that he affected when he was exhausted. "Usual story."

She spoke about something else, being careful to make no sidelong comment, and after a few moments, when he was pouring a second drink, she had her reward.

"It's a murderous business, the Bar." He looked at her, permitting her to see his fatigue. "But when you have a chance to make money you've got to grab it and hold on to it. One doesn't get so very many years."

An idea came to her. "Are they going to make you a judge?"

"No." But he smiled at her; a rather hard successful smile. "Not for two or three years at least. And, my God, it's uncertain. But I've just learnt who the present vacancy is going to. It's too complicated to explain, but it improves my chances."

When, a quarter of an hour later, the car moved off on its journey to Malcolm's house near Ascot, Mrs. Malverley was engaged in making detailed plans about how to adapt her style of dressing to the role of a judge's wife. If only, she thought, her parents could have been alive to see her!—whose highest hopes for her had been to marry a bank clerk. But she consoled herself by thinking how out of place they would have been at a smart wedding.

Malcolm's house, which she had never seen before, was a surprise to her. The car turned into a cul-de-sac, and suddenly swung between a pair of high white-painted gates, and Malcolm said, "Here we are."

But she still could not see the house, and they had to drive fully a hundred yards before they finally drew up in front of a large, rather ugly Edwardian villa. There was an elaborate entrance with white-painted pillars. On the other side there was a lawn, correctly velvety, which ran away towards some impressive timber.

They were welcomed by Malcolm's sister, Marian, whom Catherine had already met, and whose opinion of her she knew to be of no importance. She seemed rather flustered; when she showed Catherine to her room she apologized too fussily because one part of the built-in wardrobe was out of action. The house did not shout of money perhaps, but it did not whisper either; it spoke of money in an easy conversational voice. It occurred to Catherine that Malcolm's father had perhaps left a good deal.

When she entered the drawing-room the children were already there. She saw a little boy with dark hair and a round tough little-boy's face, fooling about with Malcolm, who was mixing drinks, and, curled up on the sofa, a thin blonde little girl, who,

as she entered, looked up sharply with bright eyes under slightly drooping lids.

Malcolm introduced them casually: Catherine knew already that their names were Billy and Grania. On being introduced, Billy perceptibly aged several years, turning from a child into a schoolboy, and said, "How d'you do, Mrs. Malverley," with angelic politeness.

He looked as Malcolm must have done as a child, and Catherine's heart warmed to him. Grania sat up and said, "How d'you do," in a confident negative voice. Catherine accepted a glass of sherry from Malcolm.

"Grania—a glass of sherry?"

Marian looked up sharply. "Malcolm, you're not giving the child sherry, are you?"

"I don't know yet. Grania?"

"Yes, please, Daddy." Malcolm poured out a full glass and handed it to her. Marian, Catherine observed, blushed faintly but said nothing; Grania smiled at her father and put the glass to her lips, but, Catherine thought, did not drink any. And indeed when Marian led both children from the room twenty minutes later, the glass was still full. Malcolm picked it up and emptied it into the decanter, putting the empty glass down again in the same place.

"She hates it," he said, and laughed, and Catherine remembered with something like apprehension the quality of the smile which the girl had addressed to her father.

"Grania will be very pretty," she said. "Is she like her mother?"

"Judge for yourself."

On the piano stood the photograph; Catherine had never seen a photograph of Delia before. There was no doubt, of course, it was Grania as she would be in ten years, a highborn, hard, reckless face wearing a contemptuous social smile.

"Yes," said Catherine, "I see."

"Grania's a good little brat really, only she's proud, you know, and she likes her own way."

"So I imagine."

"Like Delia," said Malcolm. He poured a drink; his voice was already a little thick. "If Delia hadn't liked her own way she wouldn't have married me. Her parents didn't approve. I wasn't out of the top drawer and I had no money—my father made a good deal but in the end he died bankrupt—and Delia had a lot of money from an uncle. Do help yourself to a drink." Catherine did so, and as she lifted the decanter she saw the crest on the silver. She felt astonishingly depressed.

The next morning, however, everything was much better. The sun was shining, the garden was first fresh and then warm, and Catherine, sensing that Billy liked her, felt her charm unfreeze and win him. They sailed his electric launch on the pond. In his bedroom he showed her the place where the workmen who were in the house had let him plaster, and together they searched for his tortoise.

Grania joined them, displaying a mixture of reserve and nervy high spirits which Catherine found hard to fathom, but which did not appear to be fundamentally unamiable. When, about noon, Malcolm emerged from his study and joined them, they were playing stump cricket on the lawn and all laughing and squealing together.

Why, oh God, oh God, why, why, thought Mrs. Malverley afterwards, why had she allowed Malcolm to force upon her one cocktail too many before luncheon? And yet, what had happened? —almost nothing.

She, Malcolm, and Marian had been talking about Malcolm's friends and rivals at the Bar, many of whom she had now met, and one or two of whom she had come to know quite well, and suddenly the idea of being married to Malcolm, of the challenge of being his wife and hostess over the next year or two while he was being considered as a judge, of being perhaps a judge's wife —all this had rushed in upon her.

Rather exuberantly she had passed on to Marian two or three little titbits of gossip. Had she used the Christian names of distinguished acquaintances a little freely? Had her voice been rather loud? She knew only that she had become aware that Grania was looking at her, regarding her with an expression like Delia's in the photograph, that social expression of veiled contempt.

Quickly, she had done what she could to save the situation, carrying on her malicious gossip until she was guying it so that the child might think it all some elaborate joke. And it was true that, later on in the afternoon, when the reaction had set in, there was a time when she thought that she had perhaps saved the day. It was in a conversation which took place mainly between herself and Billy that she had learnt that this was not so.

They were sitting in a summer-house, the two of them, while Grania was doing some kind of desultory nature-study just outside. The little boy had been telling her about his grandfather's house in Ireland, how he had been learning to manage a punt, to ride with his arms folded, how he had been taken out by the gardener's boy at night to see a badger, and then suddenly, giggling almost uncontrollably, he was describing how a friend

of his grandmother's, at tea, had got her false teeth caught on a piece of sticky cake . . . and then she saw that Grania was standing in the doorway.

"What on earth are *you* glooming at?" said Billy. "*You* laughed yourself sick afterwards. I thought you were going to *be* sick."

"I don't bore people about it for ever after, though. You know what Granny would say if she could hear you." His rudeness had given her the advantage; she contrived to sound cold rather than merely priggish.

"I *was* discussing things, just until you came in, wasn't I, Mrs. Malverley?"

"I don't quite understand . . . . ?"

"It's a thing Granny says," Billy got up and scowled at Grania. "'Servants discuss people—'"

"And," said Grania and she looked up, unhooded her eyes and smiled directly at Catherine—"'gentlefolk discuss things.'"

Bitch, thought Mrs. Malverley, in agony, bitch, if I were your stepmother . . . But it did not seem likely that she would be Grania's stepmother.

It was when she was in her room getting ready for dinner that she thought she heard Malcolm talking with the children. At first she could not make out where the murmuring indistinct voices were coming from; then she realized that they were filtering through the hole that the workmen had left in the back of the built-in wardrobe.

She put her head into the cupboard to listen; she could not make out any words, but of course they were discussing her; of course, at the end of this weekend, Malcolm was sounding their opinions.

Suddenly Mrs. Malverley unzipped her dress, tugged it off, and threw it with her stockings on the bed. At all cost, she *must* hear what was said.

The rough brickwork hurt her knees, it was dark, and she had to pull herself across the open shaft of a ventilator before she found her head above the tarpaulin which, earlier in the day, she had noticed covering the hole in the ceiling of Billy's bedroom. Her heart was pounding horribly, she was poised in great discomfort with one hand on a joist and one grabbing an angle of brickwork and even now, although she could hear Grania's voice, she could not quite make out what was being said.

Then Grania must have moved, and suddenly the words emerged. "Why does she smoke cigarettes with the funny sort of ring on a wire?"

There was hostility in the tone. Mrs. Malverley felt certain that many other habits of hers had already come under Grania's criticism during this conversation.

"To make sure her fingers don't get stained." Malcolm's voice. "Quite a lot of women do. I think it's very sensible."

"I think it's very affected."

"Don't you like Mrs. Malverley, Grania?" Malcolm's voice, his slightly surprised leading-question voice.

"I do." Billy, enthusiastic. "I think she's jolly nice."

"Because she sucked up to you. I can't stand the way she looks at anyone and sort of opens her eyes and smiles—like this."

Torturing herself, Mrs. Malverley strained to get her eye over a tiny hole to see the caricature of what she considered her most fugitive and charming gesture. At once, something gave, and slowly, but irrevocably, her face and right elbow pressed down upon the tarpaulin, which, after an instant, pulled away and left her hanging down, head and shoulders, into the room below.

Looking down upon the three upturned and astonished faces, in whose incredulous dismay she saw the final wreckage of all her hopes, Mrs. Malverley selected that of her enemy, and to it said, with immense hatred and not wholly without dignity: "Servants discuss people, gentlefolk discuss *things*."

★ ★ ★

MIXED GRILL

A thorough grilling could be third-degree, working-over, or the process that leaves sausages permanently browned-off.

We hope ours will leave you wiser, not sadder. If you come clean through these assorted brain-washers, you should have a score to your credit of 15 points.

Answers are given on page 92.

1. *My! you're looking posh! Can you give the derivation of this word?*
2. *Whereabouts would a man be greeted as:*
   a. Mijnheer b. Tuan c. Baas d. Effendi e. Sahib
3. *Who was the second husband of Napoleon's first wife?*
4. *What was the Riddle of the Sphinx? Who solved it? What was the answer?*
5. *What is the rank corresponding to Captain, R.N., in:*
   a. the Army b. the Royal Air Force
6. *What subjects do you associate with these ologies:*
   a. Oology
   b. Nosology
   c. Dendrology

MADMAN OF THE MOUNTAIN

A sudden scream and a brown figure swayed on the edge of space

by HUGH B. CAVE

THE sun gilded the sea now. Lightning still flickered among the ten-thousand-foot peaks inland, but the night was done. Behind the beach the wet New Guinea jungle brightened from black to brilliant green.

Rising to ease the ache under his ribs, Whitey Connor gazed seaward. A hundred yards out, not nearly so far away as it had seemed last night in the monsoon blackness, an angry line of white marked the sand bar where the launch had come to grief. At his feet lay the remains of the plywood skiff that had brought them halfway to shore before a head of coral sheared her keel off.

They had been lucky. All four had been good swimmers, even white-haired John Macdougal in his clumsy fashion. But the launch was gone; the skiff was matchwood. They were three men and a woman marooned on the dark edge of nowhere.

Frowning, Whitey swung about to face the others. "Well?" he said.

A sheep farmer all his life, old John Macdougal clearly looked upon the storm as an act of God, to be classed with droughts and rabbit plagues. He met Whitey's gaze in silence. But Jordan, his muscular arms about his knees, looked up in anger.

"You knew that boat was a death-trap when you bought her!"

Macdougal was close enough to reach the man with a soothing hand. "Now, Craig, it won't help to talk like that. He brought us ashore safe."

"Safe! If he'd spent your money on a seaworthy craft—"

"Does it matter who's to blame?" Alison Macdougal said crisply. "Haven't we more important things to talk about?"

She sat at her father's side, the yellow shirt damp and snug against her bold young body. Whitey sent her a look of gratitude. She would be fair. He had grown up with her on her father's vast sheep station in the big land to the south, and he knew.

There might be things about her that filled him with torment, but she would be honest.

It was she who had sought him out at Merauke, showing him the letters her brother Andrew had written before his strange disappearance. "We must have help," she had said. Another girl might have put it differently, reminding him of the past, even implying by look or manner that she still cherished the thought of him a little. Not she. "You know this country, and you were Andrew's good friend," she had said.

Now her gaze was a challenge. "What are we to do?"

With a stick Whitey drew lines in the sand. "Andrew's mission at Etna Bay is about eighty miles west of us. There may be native villages on the way where we can get help."

"May be?" Macdougal leaned forward, scowling. Sheep in Australia he understood. This untamed land was different.

"Most are trading settlements, abandoned at this time of year. East of us there is nothing. But look. In his last letter, Andrew wrote he was going up-river to the Amera region. That would be the Titinima River, beyond the Charles Louis Range to the north of us there." Whitey pointed to the misted peaks.

Alison's father thrust a thin hand into his pocket for the oilskin pouch in which he kept his valuables. Unfolding the letter, he read aloud the words his son had written six months before:

I am convinced that my troubles with the natives stem from a man, perhaps a white man, who lives somewhere in the Amera Gebergte. Who he is, or why he should wish to drive out the mission, I don't know, but if it's a fight he wants, he shall have it. I am going up-river at once to find him.

Whitey traced another line in the sand. "We can go up the Oemar River trail to the mountains, and cross the range. If we find nothing, we can go down the Titinima to the mission."

"You're insane," Jordan declared bluntly. "There's only one thing to do: make for the mission itself, along the coast."

"And when we get there?"

"Make the natives tell us where Andrew went!"

Whitey shrugged. "The government and church people have tried that already and got nowhere. They've been up the Titinima, too, I'll admit—but perhaps not far enough." Again he looked at Alison's father. "Mr. Macdougal?"

"I don't know. I'm lost in this country, Whitey."

"We may not know the country," Jordan grumbled, "but we know the man, and I say we've had all we want of his leadership! He bought us a worthless boat. He wrecked her. Now he wants to take us through unknown mountains—"

John Macdougal drew his fingers down his cheeks, as though

to press the fatigue from his face. "I suppose you're right, Craig. I don't know."

Without a word, Whitey Connor picked up the canvas rucksack containing all their goods and swung it to his shoulder.

That coast is a maze of rivers, and with Jordan impatiently setting the pace, they reached the first one, the Oemar, in less than an hour. There they halted. Whitey sat down on a fallen tree. The others gazed in consternation at the turgid flood barring their way.

"There'll be a native boat somewhere," Jordan said stubbornly.

Whitey shook his head. "There won't be."

"You said yourself there was a trail!"

"To the mountains. Ceramese traders stop along here. The mountain people come down to deal with them."

"Well, we can build a raft."

"And another at the next stream. And others after that." Whitey shrugged. "It would be quite an undertaking."

Jordan faced the Macdougals. "What do you want to do?"

"We don't have much choice, do we?" John Macdougal said with a sigh. "If there is a trail, and it will lead us to Andrew—"

"We don't know it will lead to Andrew."

"We can't stay here."

"Have it your own way," Jordan said.

Flicking a caterpillar from his sleeve, Whitey Connor stood up and faced Jordan. They were both big men. If there was any physical difference, it lay in their faces. Jordan's was ruggedly handsome with a hint of arrogance. He came of good family. A Jordan taught at the University of Sydney. Jordans trod the government corridors of Canberra. Craig himself had led expeditions to primitive Arnhem Land and written books about his findings.

As for Whitey Connor, his, too, was a handsome face, but bitterness had marked it. On the sheep station in Australia he had been John Macdougal's right-hand man, in love with Macdougal's daughter. But when in the normal course of events he had spoken to her of marriage, she had turned on him in fierce rebellion.

"Me, marry a sheep farmer?" she had said. "Not if he owned all the sheep in creation!"

Too proud to listen to old John Macdougal's fatherly advice, Whitey had left the station for a forestry job in New Guinea. The company failed and now he was on his own. He had a reputation. "Watch out for Whitey Connor," they said. "He'll have your shirt if he can get it."

Maybe he would. This was a raw land, where men fought for survival. But no man was going to accuse him unjustly and get away with it.

Whitey stood before Jordan with a menacing glint in his eyes. "Before we go anywhere, let's get one thing straight, Jordan. Your opinion of me doesn't matter. You got it second hand at Merauke, and you're welcome to it. But when Mr. Macdougal asked me to obtain a boat for this affair, and I wasn't able to hire one, I bought the best craft I could find. Your insinuation—"

Something touched his arm. He looked down and saw Alison's hand there. "Whitey," she said impatiently, "I'm sure Craig didn't mean—"

Whitey jerked his arm away. "We've got a long way to go. Save your accusations until we get there, Jordan." Angrily he scooped up the rucksack and turned away.

Before they had been ten minutes on the trail, Jordan was in the lead again, forcing the pace. The man had sound lungs, and legs made for walking. With Alison at his heels he forged ahead.

Old John Macdougal paid no attention, but plodded on at his own speed, with Whitey bringing up the rear. A methodical man, Macdougal. When the trail was blocked, he carefully sought a way round. When the high-smelling mud was deep, he ignored the footprints of those ahead and looked for a better route.

After an hour he sat down to rest on a knoll by the stream. Halting beside him, Whitey let the pack fall. Macdougal wiped his face with a handkerchief and looked up, gently shaking his head. "Jordan does this when he visits us at the station, too," he said. "We walk a lot, as you know. He always has to be first."

"You're walking fast enough for me."

They rested for five minutes and then went on. It was not an easy trail. Obviously the natives seldom used it. Where it clung to the river bank, tangled tree-roots held steaming pools of last night's rain and the naked sun was a blowlamp. Where swampy shores pushed it back into twilight jungle, the carpet of leaves was treacherous.

The ache under Whitey's ribs became a torment. It puzzled him. Only vaguely did he remember hurting himself—last night, when the skiff had cracked up under them and he had struggled ashore through the surf with the precious pack. The broken boat had come at him like a torpedo, driving him to his knees, but in the scramble to reach the shore and in the aftermath of exhaustion he had forgotten it. Now every step was agony.

"Give me the pack, Whitey." Macdougal held out his hand.

"Nothing doing."

"Really, we should share it."

"With Jordan, when we catch up with him."

They overtook the others at about noon. Jordan stood by a small brushwood fire on a sandbank at the water's edge. Four small fish hung above the flames, on a length of lawyer vine. Wild yams smoked in the wood ash. Alison, climbing from the river, waved at them as they emerged from the jungle. "You're just in time for lunch!" She didn't look tired, Whitey observed. Her face was flushed with excitement.

Easing the pack from his aching shoulders, he went to the stream to wash, took his time, and walked back to the fire without limping. No need to ask how Jordan had caught the fish; the shirt he had used for a net hung drying on a nearby bush.

"Thanks," Whitey said, accepting the food passed to him. He ate in silence, with an eye on the girl.

She was in love with Jordan, of course. He was the sort of man she had wanted all along—a man who did things. Whitey lowered his gaze. In New Guinea he had "done things," too, but with a difference: he had done them to keep alive.

Jordan put his shirt on. "We'll stop and make camp early. Four o'clock at the latest." He looked straight at Whitey. "Can you two keep up?"

"It happens to be your turn with the pack," Whitey said. "That ought to keep you within yelling distance."

It was a long afternoon. Leaving the river, the trail climbed and the jungle climbed with it. Macdougal set a slow pace, and Whitey was grateful. They rested often. Daylight was nearly gone when they reached the camp site selected by Jordan.

"Good," Macdougal murmured.

Whitey nodded. Give the man his due—it was good. Fresh water trickled from moss-covered rocks a few yards from the fire. Jordan had built a large lean-to for the men, a smaller one for Alison, and had gathered more food.

Darkness fell while they sat around the fire, eating. When he had finished, Jordan stood up. "I'm for bed. We'll need all the rest we can get. Those mountains tomorrow will be a problem." He said good night with a flip of his hand and turned away. Alison rose to follow, pausing only to smile at Whitey and touch her lips to Macdougal's cheek.

Macdougal inched himself closer to the embers and seemed to doze, with his arms about his knees. Presently the fireflies came, floating weirdly green through the jungle darkness. Above the high treetops the stars appeared. Macdougal stirred.

"Let's have a look at it, Whitey."

"Look at what?"

"Your hip, side—whatever it is that's bothering you."

Whitey scowled at the ground. "There's nothing wrong with me. If I've been holding up the procession it's because I can't see any sense—"

"Let me look." Macdougal reached behind him for the rucksack.

The firelight revealed an ugly abrasion, and Macdougal's fingers gently probed the edges of it. "Feels like a cracked rib," he said. "Perhaps broken. But maybe I can strap it." He worked slowly, strapping the bandage in place with lengths of adhesive tape. The pain sharpened under pressure, then lost its edge.

"Better?"

Whitey wiped the salt sweat from his eyes. "A great help. Thanks." He tucked his shirt in. "I didn't know you had noticed it."

They watched the fire in silence, the older man feeding it with small sticks from time to time. Then quietly, "What made you stay on in this forsaken country after the forestry people left?"

"I could see things here."

"What things?"

"Rubber, sugar, coffee—you name it and it's here. Even sheep." Whitey's grin was wry. "This land is untouched, except for the get-rich-quick lads. I'm saving my money. When there's enough, I'll know what to do with it."

Macdougal let his hand rest for a moment on Whitey's knee, then stood up.

"It's a queer world. First I lose Andrew, then you. Now I'm to lose Alison too, it seems, unless—"

"Unless what, Mr. Macdougal?"

"I don't know. Miracles don't happen, do they?" The firelight painted a small frown between Macdougal's brows. "Well, I'm an old man, Whitey. Need my sleep."

Patches of snow glittered on the highest peaks. Now and then they were visible from the ascending jungle trail, but throughout most of the morning the range was capped with clouds. About noon, Alison spied a column of smoke.

"What does it mean?" She put the question to Whitey. He and Macdougal had stuck doggedly at Jordan's heels this morning.

"Mountain people," Whitey said. "Negritos, maybe."

A shadow flickered in Craig Jordan's eyes, "Will they make trouble?"

"Probably won't even show themselves. They're shy."

Jordan nodded briskly and pushed on again, still fresh after hours of arduous climbing.

The pain under the adhesive strips was less crippling this morning. But they had left the river far below, and the trail now curled steeply upward through a notch between peaks. There were stretches, more and more of them, where the path became a mere lizard track along sheer falls of rock.

One such stretch brought Jordan to a halt. "We ought to have a rope," he said. Standing in the shadow of jungle trees, he peered ahead into sunlit space. The mountainside fell sheer for hundreds of feet. The track was a mere scar on bare rock, wriggling in and out of dim crevices.

Without comment, Whitey moved past and took the lead. Before Jordan or Macdougal could stop her, Alison had stepped out behind him.

"Face in," Whitey advised. "Don't look down." He had the rucksack this morning and it thumped against him with every step, but there was nothing he could do about it. Crabwise, feeling for handholds, he worked along the cliff, pausing now and then to pull the girl along with words of encouragement. It was good rock, solid. In the first niche he sat down to rest and get his breath, Alison beside him.

They exchanged only a few words. "Good girl," Whitey said. "Scared?"

"Almost to death."

"We've that much in common, anyway."

Jordan and Macdougal joined them and Whitey stood up again. It was not so far to the next resting-place and the trail across the cliff was wider, littered with stones. He looked up. Roots and vines overhung the crest, a hundred feet above. Twenty feet behind him, Alison matched his forward progress.

The cliff curved sharply to the next niche and the crevice was a cave. Whitey rounded the bend. Ten feet more and the worst would be over. A clap of thunder stopped him. Thunder in a world of silence. An explosion, followed by an ear-splitting yell from above. He looked up, saw a boulder teetering on the brink, and understood.

He tore the pack from his shoulders and flung it at the cave, lurched about and scrambled back round the bend. The first boulder had bounded from the trail and gone hurtling into the green sea of the valley. The second was on its way down. It struck the path a yard from John Macdougal's daughter.

The girl, open-mouthed but silent, spread her arms wide and flattened herself against the cliff. From above pealed a chorus of yells that lifted the short hairs on Whitey's neck.

Natives. Half a dozen were visible there at the brink—little dark men struggling with another missile. The girl was their target. Behind her on the trail, Jordan had halted. Suddenly he pressed himself against the cliff and wriggled back—back towards the safety of the first niche.

Whitey took in the whole thing while surging forward. At Alison's side, an arm tight about her waist, he looked up again. "Wait." The boulder rocked and fell, with earth and small stones cascading after it. He held the girl to the wall with his body until the rock struck the trail and sailed off into emptiness.

"Now! Hang on to me!"

She clung to his hand and ran with him, and it was like running on a rope. The boulders had broken the path. They leapt the scars, rounded the bend, reached the safety of the cave in a breathless rush. The girl sank down.

"Sit tight," Whitey told her. With a stone in each hand he stepped out on the trail again.

The angle of the cliff hid the niche in which Jordan and Macdougal had sought shelter. He sent a yell. "Make a break for it when I drive those fellows back!" Luckily there was room for throwing. He hurled stones until his arm ached.

Jordan came first, rounding the angle of the cliff at a dangerous run. Ignoring Whitey, he went straight to Alison, dropped on one knee beside her, and caught her hands. John Macdougal came more slowly, halting every few steps to peer anxiously at the cliff-top.

His outstretched fingers were cold and moist when Whitey gripped them, but he managed a smile. "Did you say *shy*?"

"The mountain people are usually friendly enough. Someone must have put them up to this. We may be close to our destination."

"If we can get across this condemned cliff," Jordan said.

Whitey glanced at Alison. Evidently she hadn't noticed Jordan's behaviour; she had been too busy trying to save herself. Jordan apparently thought no one had noticed. Whitey shrugged. "When you're ready, I'll keep our friends busy dodging rocks while you three get across." He picked up some stones.

"Dodging?" Jordan looked at him pityingly and took the stones.

The natives had come to the top of the cliff again, chattering like birds and pointing to the cave mouth. Jordan stepped out on the sunlit ledge, took aim, and let fly. A scream punctuated the chattering. He threw again. Whitey saw a brown figure swaying on the edge of space, clutching its face. The others frantically pulled him back.

Jordan wiped his hands. "That should change their minds for them, don't you think?"

For answer, Whitey shouldered the pack and stepped out on the trail.

Not once during the afternoon did they hear sounds of pursuit, and when they halted to make camp for the night, Whitey felt reasonably secure. While the others built lean-to sheds and got a fire going, he went on a little distance to reconnoitre. Twenty minutes' walking brought him to the head of the pass.

The sun was a fiery ball in the west, the valley at his feet already so dark that the stream winding through it gleamed like a silver ribbon.

On the opposite slope, tantalizingly close but hours away by trail, stood a house. Not a native hut, though its roof was of thatch. It was too big for that. This was a house with terraced gardens on the slope below and a stone cistern on the knoll above.

Whitey rubbed his jaw. In the jungles of New Guinea all things are possible. But a house, a white man's house, here? It was beyond reason.

He returned to camp. "I've seen the place we're heading for, I think. We should be there tomorrow."

They asked a hundred questions, but to the all-important one he had no answer. "I can only guess. Three or four years ago a man named Dormeyer, an old-time prospector, shot and killed a patrol officer, then disappeared. If he's our man, it would explain his campaign to discourage the mission. A mission opens up a region. Traders come in. Often a settlement springs up."

Craig Jordan stood up, hands on hips. "You think he knows we are here?"

"After what happened this afternoon, yes."

"Are we safe here tonight?"

Whitey's shrug was eloquent. "As I understand it, we didn't come here to be safe. We came to find Alison's brother."

Whitey had no sleep that night. Even when Macdougal crept from the larger lean-to to relieve him at guard duty he stayed by the fire, content to lie back and close his eyes for a time. Macdougal's willingness to share the burden was not enough. A man had to be on intimate terms with the jungle to identify the significant sounds. The negritos were not night prowlers, as a rule. Still, there were times when Whitey rose swiftly to his feet, not certain whether the whispers and rustlings in the blackness were animal noises.

Alison slept, exhausted by the day's march and the ordeal on the cliff. Whether Jordan slept or not, Whitey did not know. Sounds from the lean-to indicated he was awake, but he came to the fire only twice during the night.

With the first light, they left the camp behind them. This time Jordan did not forge ahead on the trail. Whitey took the lead and held it.

At the head of the pass he halted. "There it is."

The house. That incredible house. But was it inhabited?

"There's not a sign of life about the place," Jordan declared. "If you ask me, it's abandoned and we're on a wild-goose chase, as I've said all along."

The trail into the valley was steep but well-worn, twisting through layers of mist, which thinned as the sun climbed. It was magnificent country, walled from the world outside by the cloud-capped peaks. A natural hide-out. But it was deceptive country, too. The afternoon was far gone when they reached the river.

Whitey halted in dismay. That silver ribbon, so innocent from above, was forty feet wide here, flowing deep and swift between steep walls of rock. A fragile cat-walk of vines and cut poles dangled above the gorge. Of the house on the slope beyond, nothing was visible but a triangle of roof.

The loneliness of the place pulled at his nerves. Gripping the vine handrails, he stepped out with misgivings, Macdougal trustfully at his heels, Alison and Jordan gingerly trailing. The bridge was sturdy enough.

The bullet must have been aimed at Whitey. It plucked at a buckle on the rucksack strap, twisting him halfway round, and then the sound of the shot was a sharp crack in the distance, bounding along the peaks. Behind Whitey, Macdougal cried out and stumbled, clutching his thigh.

Whitey regained his balance. "Go back!"

But Macdougal was down, blood running between his fingers. Alison and Jordan struggled to lift him to his feet. Whitey, urging them back, plucked the man up bodily and carried him to the bank. A second bullet thudded into a tree beside the trail.

An ugly wound. The rucksack buckle must have flattened the slug; its path through Macdougal's leg was ragged. While Alison and Jordan used the first-aid kit, Whitey cut boughs for a bed. Gently they laid the hurt man on it.

"We can't go back." Whitey shook his head. "He'd never make it across the cliff. How far we are from the mission I don't know. Close enough, maybe, if we had a boat or could get some trustworthy natives to carry a litter. But with that man trying to kill us—"

"We'd better think of something," Jordan said "We can't stay here!"

Whitey, ignoring him, dropped on one knee at Macdougal's side. "When it gets dark, Mr. Macdougal, I'll get across the river somehow and pay our friend a call. He can help us. One way or another, I'll talk him into it."

Macdougal's eyes filled with alarm. "No, Whitey! no—"

"Nothing to it." Whitey laid a hand on the man's shoulder. "You get some sleep now. We'll look after you."

Not much was said during the hours of waiting. Alison remained at her father's side. Jordan walked about like a caged animal. Whitey had things to do.

Slipping through the bush to the edge of the gorge, he considered the situation. Could he cross on the bridge? He didn't think so. He had seen for himself, last night, how brightly the river gleamed in the dark. Anything moving on the cat-walk would be an easy target.

He found a spot twenty yards upstream where the wall of the gorge—what he could see of it—appeared to offer holds for hands and feet. He left a handkerchief on a bush in order to mark the spot.

The sun had set by the time he got back to the others. Jordan was putting the finishing touches to a well-made stretcher.

"Why that?" Whitey demanded.

"Even if you get across the river, what can you accomplish against a man with a gun?" With scarcely a glance at Whitey, Jordan finished his job and stood up to survey his handiwork. "Do what you want—you will, anyway—but in the morning Alison and I are starting down-river to the mission."

Whitey frowned at the girl. "Is that what you want?"

"Your way is too dangerous, Whitey."

He nodded. They were wrong, of course. Burdened with a man on a litter, they would never reach the mission. And if by a miracle they did, what then? The place had been reported abandoned two months ago. In all probability Andrew Macdougal was dead, murdered by the man in the house over there.

But the time to argue was in the morning, not now. Whitey sat down to rest, watching the darkness thicken. He watched the fireflies. When they were out in force, he stood up.

"Be seeing you."

The handkerchief on the bush showed him where to go down on his stomach. Wriggling over the rocks, he descended swiftly from ledge to ledge. The jungle darkness had sharpened his eyes. Here under the open sky, with the bright water below, he

could see as by moonlight, though the moon was not yet up. The river pulled at his legs.

He threw himself into the current. It sucked him under, rolled him over boulders, swept him swiftly downstream past the bridge. Even when he reached shallow water near the far bank, it made him fight for every step. He worked his way upstream, found the ascent he had marked in his mind, and began climbing.

The bank was of shale, which broke under him. But there were vines to cling to and ledges to rest on. At the top he broke through a bamboo thicket and found himself on the trail. It was a ladder of boulders.

Again the crack of the rifle came after the bullet. The bullet ricocheted from a rock just above him. Needles of stone stabbed his upturned face. He recoiled too fast, too far, and the echoes of the shot pulsed through the gorge as he fell.

He rolled the whole way to the end of the bridge in an avalanche of dirt and stones, slammed into a tree beside the trail, and lay there, stunned. He crawled into the bush. There the shock wave rolled over him.

When it had passed and his eyes opened again, he saw a figure running across the bridge. He heard his name. "Whitey!" It was Alison's voice, frantic but not loud. "Where are you?"

Whitey forced himself to stand up. "No, you crazy fool—go back!"

Too late. She was across. She had hold of his arms and was peering into his face. "Whitey," she gasped, "the shot—"

On the trail above—not too far above—a dislodged stone began rolling. It clattered down the slope and crashed into the undergrowth.

"He's on his way down here." Whitey drew her deeper into the jungle. "Stay still. Don't move." Turning quickly, he climbed. Not up the trail this time. Through the bush, on hands and knees.

It was agony. The jungle grew out of sharp rocks. Every second bush had thorns an inch long. Every vine was a snare. And he had to be quiet.

Now. He was high enough. About here the trail looped towards him. This was where the bullet had sought him out. He crawled to the edge of the path and set himself, feet under him, knees bent, knuckles resting on the ground.

A man came down the path. No sound; just a short, heavy man with a rifle. His skin was white. His only garment was a dark rag twisted about his middle. Shaggy hair hung on his forehead; a tangle of beard hid mouth and chin. Whitey let him go by.

In mid stride the man halted, rose on the balls of his bare feet, leaned forward. He was staring down the slope at the brush tangle where Alison lay. He put the rifle to his shoulder.

Whitey was above the man. He rose from his crouch like a sprinter, and his take-off carried him through a gap between thorny branches. Startled by the sound, the man turned in one fluid motion to face him. But the gun had been aimed down the slope. Before he could bring it up, Whitey crashed into him, Whitey's forearm struck him in the throat. They fell among the boulders together.

The man was strong. But Whitey thought of the gun aimed at Alison, cowering there in the dark. With a knee in the man's stomach, he got his hands on the beard and matted hair. He reared back, lifted the shaggy head, and slammed it hard against the rocks. Once was enough.

He stood up. Alison crept from her hiding-place and climbed up to him, gripping his arms as she had before.

"Are you all right?"

He nodded, getting his breath.

She looked at the man. "Who is it, Whitey? The one you told us about?"

"I don't know. I never knew Dormeyer." He turned her round. "Go down to the bridge. Yell across to Jordan to come and take care of this fellow. I want to see that house."

She hesitated. Her face changed expression. "Whitey, Craig Jordan tried to stop me from coming to you."

"He should have stopped you. Crossing the bridge like that —it was crazy."

"I'm crazy, then." She stepped closer, "I want to be crazy. You risked your life. Twice, Whitey—twice you've risked your life to save mine. I hope you know why you did it."

Whitey took time to look at her. "I know why I did it," he said then. With his hands on her face, he put his mouth hard against hers, wanting to hurt her a little. Not much, but a little. Never in the old days had he kissed her like that. Then, "Do what I told you, Alison," he said. "Get Jordan."

He waited beside the unconscious man until Jordan came up the trail, then took the rifle, and turned away. He hadn't far to go. He halted by the house and peered through a window. The darkness revealed nothing. There was no sound.

He pushed the door and entered, found a table with a lamp on it, but had nothing to light it with. When he turned, the rifle stock struck the table. A muffled voice reached out for him through the dark. "Dormeyer, be reasonable. Come to your senses, man. Let me out of here!"

Whitey stood very still. "Andrew Macdougal, is that you?"

The man's voice came again, hoarse with excitement. Whitey went towards it until a door stopped him. His hand found a padlock. Raising the rifle, he brought the butt down on the lock.

New Guinea is the incubator of the remarkable; has been since Jorge de Menezes set the first white foot on its hostile shores in 1526. Andrew Macdougal's tale was no stranger than many another.

"I came here to find out who was turning the natives against my mission." He spoke to his father, lying now on a home-made couch in Dormeyer's sitting-room, but his wry smile included Whitey, Alison, Jordan, even the open door of the bedroom where Dormeyer lay asleep. "It turned out to be Dormeyer, of course. He didn't try to stop me, but when I got here he threatened to kill me. Said he had to. The government wanted him."

"For murder," Whitey said.

"But it wasn't Dormeyer who killed the man."

They were silent.

"It was a native, who got hold of Dormeyer's gun. However, poor Dormeyer hadn't a shred of proof to clear himself and went into hiding. When I found him, he'd been living here by himself nearly four years. Too long for a man of his temperament. I couldn't leave him here, an innocent man, to go mad with loneliness," Andrew Macdougal went on. "So I stayed, trying to persuade him to go out with me. Half a dozen times he agreed to, then got afraid again, and changed his mind. Just a couple of days ago I thought I had him finally convinced—"

"Then we came."

"You came. The natives must have warned him. He didn't say a word to me, but yesterday, catching me off guard, he locked me in the little store-room there."

"And now?" Alison asked.

Jordan answered. On his feet, hands on hips, he faced them. "The sooner we leave here, the better. When Dormeyer is with us, the natives won't molest us; in fact, they'll probably help us. There's no doubt in my mind that once we reach the mission we can get word—"

He stopped in confusion. Only Andrew Macdougal, who didn't know what had happened earlier between the two men, was listening.

"We'll leave when Mr. Macdougal feels up to it," Whitey said.

Rising, he stood behind Alison's chair, with his hands on

her shoulders. "Have you had any weddings at your mission yet, Andrew?"

"No. Not yet."

Whitey felt Jordan's gaze on him and turned his head. For a moment their eyes clashed; then Jordan looked away.

"You're going to," Whitey said.

Alison, tipping her head back, looked up at him proudly.

★ ★ ★

WHO'LL BUY MY LINGUAL?
(*or, You pronounce pluie, Louie*)

I wander through a Paris shower,
Off to inspect a flat *à louer.*

The water pours as from a pitcher
On walls inscribed "*Défense d'afficher.*"

If I have splashed through such a pond,
I don't remember *où* or *quand.*

With raindrops glistening on my garment,
I reach my goal, I don't know *comment.*

I ring, I do not wish to trespass,
For trespassing is naughty, *n'est-ce pas?*

The stairway irks my fallen arch,
Because one learns *l'ascenseur ne marche.*

I like the flat; with cheerful mien
I murmur to the man, "*Combien?*"

He mentions his idea of payment,
I say that it's exorbitant, *vraiment*—

Have I misunderstood his statement?
I do not speak the French *parfaitement.*

He mentions a reduced emolument,
I cry that it's a deal, *absolument.*

And now I think a glass of wine
Would not be too unpleasant, *hein?*

OGDEN NASH

Cupid speed the clocks

Pray let us be married,
too long we have tarried

Babs looked puzzled and distressed.

" I cannot understand what all this fuss is about, nor why you are scolding me," she said. " If you didn't want to kiss me, why did you kiss me? I should like it much better if you would take me in your arms and kiss me again. I suppose you would if I said I'd marry you? "

Cadenhouse hesitated a moment, then sat down beside her, and put his arm round her. His whole countenance had changed. Pent-up passion glowed in his eyes.

" You will marry me? " he whispered.

Babs raised her lips to his.

That second kiss tingled through every vein of the recluse.

" God, what a moment! " he breathed.

SARAH GRAND, *Babs the Impossible*

Roundabout

A turtle to a serpent cried O be my valentine
Your predatory coils about my horny shell entwine
Or leave a kiss within the cup and I'll not ask for wine
If you will yield your languid length and meltingly be mine;
Our wedding feast we'll celebrate with undulations serpentine
On linseed cake ambrosial and nectarous oil of turpentine.

NICHOLAS DEE

Professional Circles

Mr. Pomfret turned back to his girl friend.

" Poor old Dick! Whenever he gets upset it reminds him of that time at the club when he got stuck with a fishbone. He turned black and . . . "

" Now that's quite enough John," Miss Jennings stopped him. " In another minute you'll get me laughing and if Jane sees she'll think we're being rude."

" Well all right then," he replied in what seemed to be great good humour. " Now wait a minute. I've paid haven't I? All right then, let's go back to your great bed."

And they left, an elegant couple that attracted much attention, her sad face beaming.

HENRY GREEN, *Nothing*

Official Spheres

I heard the happy lark exult
Too soon, for it was early ult.;
And now the land with rain is rinsed—
Ah, mournful is the month of inst.;
Love, like a lizard in the rocks,
Is hungry for the suns of prox.

Boy Cupid with his catapult
Could find but sorry sport in ult.;
But through the woods, with bluebells chintzed,
My lady comes to me in inst.;
And O may Cupid speed the clocks,
For she will marry me in prox.!

A. P. HERBERT, *What a Word!*

Moment of Triumph

" You know not what I am capable of when under the dominion of passion. I am capable of the darkest crimes, or of the brightest virtues. The woman who has a man's heart in her power may mould it to her own purposes, be they good or ill. Reject me, and you drive me to despair and plunge me into guilt. Accept me, and you may lead me into any course you please."

" Were I assured of this—" cried Amabel.

" Rest assured of it," returned the Earl passionately. " Oh, yield to impulses of natural affection, and do not suffer a cold and calculating creed to chill your better feelings. How many a warm and loving heart has been so frozen! Do not let yours be one of them. Be mine! be mine! " Amabel looked at him earnestly for a moment while he, assured that he had gained his point, could not conceal a slightly triumphant smile.

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH, *Old St. Pauls*

Arctic Vengeance

**Huge, formless, menacing
something moved in the icy blackness**

by ARTHUR GORDON

THE Russian admiral said in his soft, menacing voice, " You are supposed to be the experts, gentlemen. I am only a sailor. You were brought to this island to give me explanations, not theories. Facts, not fantasies." His cold eyes probed the faces of the three men in front of his desk. " Do I make myself clear? "

Outside, the pale sunlight glinted impartially on the camouflaged buildings, the fixed bayonets of the sentries, the sluggish steel-coloured sea. Here discipline was ironclad, security was complete. This was Arctic Experimental Station B, Vice-Admiral Kutsov commanding. The experiments had only one purpose: to make sure that Russia possessed the strongest, deadliest submarine fleet in the world.

It was a nightmare place, but well chosen—and for a single reason. At three points only the cone of the submerged volcano broke the surface. This tiny islet and two jagged splinters of rock—lost, forgotten, until the Soviets had discovered the drowned giant, and found a use for the awful pit descending into the unimaginable depths of the sea.

The admiral pushed back his chair and stood up, a compact, powerful figure. He had been speaking in English for the benefit of Sneyder, the renegade American scientist.

Now he continued, his voice suddenly shrill and angry, " You have already had a week! You have had the privilege of witnessing a duplication of our first experiment. And what are the results? We lose another of our T-class submarines—our newest and best. How? Why? That is what you three experts are supposed to tell me. And you tell me nothing! "

" You are going too deep! " Sneyder's thin, embittered face was flushed. " Eleven thousand feet—that's over two miles! No submersible can withstand such pressures! "

" That is not true! " Brodsky, the Russian designer, turned on him, clenching his huge fists. " My submarines can go even deeper! They are designed to withstand a pressure of four

hundred atmospheres—or more. The pressure did not destroy them. Something else did!"

The admiral was watching the third man, who stood silent, arms folded. "And you, my dear von Dehn! My superiors assure me that you are, without question, the world's greatest authority on submarine-detection devices. They say that we were most fortunate to be able to—er—borrow you at the end of the last war; that you have worked for us faithfully and well. What is your explanation?"

The tall, grey-haired German nodded coldly towards the desk. "You have my report."

"Report?" Kutsov slammed his hand down on the back of the chair. "Of course I have your report! It says you tracked the T-2 with your latest devices down to eleven thousand feet. There you got a brief double echo, and then, nothing. Nothing! But that's impossible! Even if the hull of the T-2 had collapsed, even if she had been crushed like an egg-shell, you should still have been able to get an echo from the wreckage. All the way down to the bottom. Down, down, down! Isn't that so?"

"Theoretically." The German's voice was edged with contempt.

Kutsov's face crimsoned. "Then why didn't you?"

"Because," Brodsky said excitedly, "because she was caught in some strong cross-current, was swept under a ledge, was pinned there—"

Sneyder gave a snort of disgust. "I can tell you flatly that there are no such currents at that depth. Certainly not in the crater of an extinct volcano that descends far below the level of the surrounding ocean floor. It was the pressure, I tell you. Three hundred and fifty atmospheres! Insanity!" He gestured wildly, the jerky, unco-ordinated movement of a badly frightened man. "You had never tried to go below three thousand feet before. Then suddenly you descend to more than three times that depth. Madness!"

Brodsky turned on him furiously. "And I tell you—"

"*Silence!*" Kutsov cut him off. He pointed one stubby finger accusingly. "Von Dehn, you have been given every consideration. You were allowed to bring your own equipment, even your own assistant. The barge was placed exactly as you directed. I will give you twenty-four hours; no more! After that, failure to produce an explanation will be treated as sabotage—sabotage by all of you! The loss of one or two submarines and their crews—that is nothing. But the failure to produce an explanation of their loss—that is a crime against the state!"

The German clicked his heels and made a little ironic bow.

" I understand your position, Admiral. In less than twenty-four hours, I trust, you will have your answer."

Outside, the pale sun had plunged into the sea; the air was grey and chill. The helmeted guard swung into position behind von Dehn, but the German ignored him. From where he stood he could see clearly the pontoon bridge that he had had built, one end anchored to the volcanic rock, the other attached to the barge that held his equipment. Only thus could the barge be kept in place, centred exactly over the stupendous column of water.

There he had sat, supersensitive earphones clamped to his head, following the T-2 as she settled into the abyss. There he had been sitting when the strong, clear echo—and the submarine itself—vanished, two miles down in the icy dark. Two miles down . . . And then—he clenched his fists suddenly. He had decided not to think any more about it. The time for thinking was past. The time for everything was past. Except for the last few hours of waiting. Except for—

A hand plucked urgently at his sleeve. He turned. It was Sneyder, his rodent face pinched with fright, the long scarf around his neck wildly incongruous, it was so untidy, so completely civilian. " Von Dehn, you told Kutsov that he'd get an explanation! Did you mean that? Or were you just bluffing? You heard what he said. They'll charge us with sabotage! There won't even be a trial! "

The German gave him a thin-lipped smile. " You should have given some thought to such a possibility before you changed sides."

" You also changed sides! "

" Only," said von Dehn, " because, when they captured me, they captured my wife and child as well." He pulled his great-coat tighter round him. " And now, if you'll excuse me—"

" I don't want to die! " Sneyder fairly shrieked the words. " If you can only find the explanation, if you can give Kutsov the right answer—"

" It would make no difference," the German said. " We have seen this place. We have even been aboard a T-class submarine. Do you think they would let a foreigner live, knowing what we know now? Don't be naïve, my friend! "

He shook off the imploring hand, went swiftly down the steep ramp that led to the water. The guard followed him stolidly; their footsteps rang on the stout planking of the pontoon bridge.

Beneath them the ocean lay black, silent, unbelievably deep. Here, aeons ago, water had conquered fire in an explosion that made man's latest efforts seem puny by comparison. Unbidden,

a phrase from Genesis leapt into the German's mind: *And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.*

Unconsciously he quickened his stride. There was not much more time.

Where the bridge met the barge, the guard halted. This concession, at least, von Dehn had been able to wring from his captors: no surveillance while he was actually at work. There were hidden microphones, of course, designed to record the words that passed between him and his assistant. But he knew how to deal with those. The mastery of sound in all its phases—this was the ruling passion of his life.

He went straight to the control room. Bohrmann, his assistant, sprang to attention, and slipped the earphones from his head. Bohrmann with his high pale forehead and nervous fingers, one of East Germany's most brilliant young scientists, assigned to von Dehn by special order of the Kremlin. Bohrmann who, having no fatherland, gave all his loyalty, all his allegiance to the older man.

"Any change?" Von Dehn's voice sounded harsh, strained.

"The rate of ascent is accelerating, sir."

"How much?"

"It's rising now at almost ten feet per minute."

"And its depth?"

Bohrmann's eyes flicked to the desk pad with its jumble of calculations and symbols. "Just under two thousand five hundred feet."

Von Dehn's mouth tightened. "That gives us until—just about dawn. Did you try again to calculate the size?"

Bohrmann nodded. He ran his tongue once over his lips. "It's even larger than we thought it was."

Von Dehn picked up the headphones, adjusted them, and sat down at the control panel. Here he had been sitting five days ago when the T-2 vanished, when the strange double echo had come ringing back, and then—silence.

Here he and Bohrmann had sat all through that day, all through the next night, probing, probing with their invisible fingers of sound, employing other devices too—devices designed to cut through the varying temperature layers, devices more sensitive and accurate than any others in existence, devices that were the product of naked genius—von Dehn's and to some extent Bohrmann's. And near dawn, almost eighteen hours after the submarine had vanished, they made their first contact with—it.

They had thought, at first, that it was the submarine. Bohrmann had sprung to his feet with a hoarse cry of triumph. But von Dehn had sat quite still, fingertips frozen on the control

dials. Because, although the contact was faint and elusive, something was wrong.

He knew it instinctively, instantly. And as he listened, the conviction grew that it was not the submarine. The quality of the contact was different. It was not a contact with man-made metal. It was a contact with something else.

Something huge, something formless, something malignant, menacing. Far down in the icy blackness, sightless, soundless, something stirred. Despite the frightful pressure—almost four hundred tons to the square foot—something moved. And then they lost contact.

Two hours later they picked it up again, held it long enough to try another method of submarine detection, based on another principle entirely. And Bohrmann said, grey-faced, " The way it moves, it's almost as if it were reacting to our signals. It's almost as if it were—" He did not finish the sentence.

Von Dehn nodded slowly. His face looked drawn and old. " That's right," he said. " It's almost as if it were—alive."

In the nightmare hours that followed they established contact and lost it three times. The thing kept disappearing, kept moving out of range into some vast cavern or gallery where they could not track it. And it was angry. There was purpose in the way it came forth, hurling its great bulk into the tremendous funnel of rock, then withdrawing slowly, sullenly.

They plotted its size as best they could, then looked at each other, silent, unbelieving. Beside it, a submarine, even a T-class submarine, would have been a toy, a matchstick.

Bohrmann said in a whisper, " They won't believe us when we report it. Kutsov won't believe us. No one will believe us."

And von Dehn said, " There will be no report, understand? No report whatever."

When they lost contact for the third time, the older man flung himself on a couch, exhausted. He would not sleep, he told himself—only rest for five minutes, ten. But he did sleep, he must have slept, because he woke with a start to find Bohrmann shaking him. It was cold in the control room, but Bohrmann's pale forehead was glistening with sweat.

" It's moving again," he said. " This time it's moving up! "

Gradually, inexorably, it came, the thing that was impossible, the thing that could not be. Three feet per minute at first. Slowly, slowly, adjusting to the change in pressure, while on the island the Russian radar scanned the skies for possible enemies from without, and the guards maintained their iron vigilance against any betrayal, any sabotage from within.

Up, up, pausing now and then, but never for long. Nearer, always nearer.

And once Bohrmann said wildly, " Maybe we're goading it with our signals! Maybe if we stop, it'll go back down, back to where it belongs, back to where it came from! "

Von Dehn, his face set like stone, ordered, " Keep plotting! "

And Bohrmann said, " But what will it do—what will it do when it reaches the surface? "

Von Dehn said, " Ask the crew of the T-2. Don't ask me."

And they plotted it, they kept on plotting it, one of them always at the control panel, careful to make out the daily report for Kutsov, careful to make sure that it said nothing.

Von Dehn slept little, Bohrmann not at all. On the third morning, Bohrmann cried out suddenly, " I'm not afraid to die! But I can't stand this waiting! I can't stand this not knowing! "

Looking at him with red-rimmed eyes, von Dehn felt a surge of anger. " No one is forcing you to wait! You have a razor, haven't you? Or if you dislike the touch of steel, the water outside is cold—and deep! "

Bohrmann passed a shaking hand across his face. " I'm sorry," he said at length. " I'm all right now. It won't happen again."

"It's no disgrace to fear death," von Dehn said more gently. " And the unknown is harder to face. But you must recognize the importance of controlling fear. If we give way to panic, the Russians may discover what we know. They might be able to evacuate the island—submarines, technicians, everything. They might even seal off the crater with a fission bomb. That must not be allowed to happen. We owe it to ourselves, to Germany, to the world. We must sit here and listen. We must wait."

Bohrmann said woodenly, " You are right. We must wait."

So they waited, through the fourth day and into this, the fifth.

Looking now at his assistant's haggard face, von Dehn felt a sudden twinge of pity. " Lie down," he said. " Get some rest. I'll take over here."

But Bohrmann shook his head. " I might fall asleep. I'm afraid to sleep. I don't want to be asleep when—"

" I'll wake you," said von Dehn. " If we begin to get an instantaneous echo, I'll wake you. I promise."

He took the younger man by the arm, led him over to the couch. " Lie down. Lie down." He stood over Bohrmann, waiting until fatigue conquered fear, until the pale eyelids closed. He said softly, " It's a pity you are so young." He turned and went back to the control panel. He checked once more the rate of ascent. Almost thirteen feet per minute. He checked the depth. Two thousand one hundred feet. Soon, now. Very soon.

He woke Bohrmann as he had promised. He saw fear fill the wide eyes, saw in them, too, the unspoken question. He nodded, saw Bohrmann leap to his feet, hurl himself through the control-room door. Well, let him go; it made no difference now.

Under his feet, for the first time, von Dehn felt a faint tremor. It came again, not sudden or abrupt, but slow, inexorable, as if the world were tilting slightly, as if the sea itself were being displaced, were being shouldered aside. Outside, he knew, dawn was greying the sky. There was no wind, no sound.

The barge lurched, staggered, rose. A strange and horrible odour filled the air, a coldness like a breath from the tomb. Still there was no sound, but suddenly Bohrmann came floundering back, mouth twisted, eyes wild. Von Dehn had seen many men die, but he had never seen such fear, such naked terror, on any human countenance.

"Run!" shrieked Bohrmann, "for God's sake, run!" And he fled.

But Erich von Dehn, who feared death as much as any man, was still too proud to run from it. He sat there, a thin smile on his face, waiting for death to come to him.

And it came.

From the shore came a vast rending sound, and then a hideous jumble of noises: the shrill wailing of alarm sirens, and the crack of rifles, and a high-pitched, inhuman screaming.

But these did not last long . . .

Out from Murmansk, out from Archangel roared the avenging planes in response to the wild, incoherent call, the radio distress call that ended in mid sentence. Out they came, the red stars on their wings gleaming in the pearly light. They were fast, they were deadly, but they were too late.

Gone were the camouflaged buildings, the docks, the installations. Gone were the submarines, the crews that manned them, the men who serviced them. Gone were the concrete submarine pens—not just destroyed, but gone completely, utterly vanished.

Only the naked rock remained, barren as it had been in the beginning. And a fetid odour that defied the cold north wind. And a trace of greyish slime that rose and fell, sullenly, upon the brooding surface of the deep.

★ ★ ★

RELATIVE CLAWS

Better to sit up all night than go to bed with a dragon.

JEREMY TAYLOR, 1613-1667

Enchanted Trolley

As it rounded the endless green curve all time stood still

by RAY BRADBURY

THE first light on the roof outside; very early morning. The leaves on all the trees tremble with a soft awakening to any breeze the dawn may offer. And then, far off, round a curve of silver track, comes the trolley, balanced on four small steel-blue wheels, and it is painted the colour of tangerines. Epaulets of shimmery brass cover it, and pipings of gold; and its chrome bell bings if the ancient motorman taps it with a wrinkled shoe.

The numerals on the trolley's front and sides are bright as lemons. Within, its seats prickle with cool green moss. Something like a buggy whip flings up from its roof to brush the spider-thread high in the passing trees from which it takes its juice. From every window blows an incense, the all-pervasive blue and secret smell of summer storms and lightning.

Down the long, elm-shadowed streets the trolley moves, alone, the motorman's grey gloves touched gently, timelessly, to the controls.

At noon the motorman stopped his car in the middle of the block and leaned out. "Hey!"

And Douglas and Charlie and Tom and all the boys and girls on the block saw the grey glove waving, and dropped from trees and left skipping-ropes in white snakes on lawns, to run and sit in the green plush seats, and there was no charge. Mr. Tridden, the conductor, kept his glove over the mouth of the fare box as he moved the trolley on down the shady block.

"Hey," said Charlie, "where are we going?"

"Last ride," said Mr. Tridden, eyes on the high electric wire ahead. "No more trolley. Bus starts tomorrow. Going to retire me with a pension, they are. So—a free ride for everyone! Watch out!"

He moved the brass handle, the trolley groaned and swung round an endless green curve, and all the time in the world stood still, as if only the children and Mr. Tridden and his miraculous machine were riding an endless river, away.

"Last day?" asked Douglas, stunned. "They can't *do* that—

they can't take off the trolley! Why, no matter how you look at it, a bus ain't a trolley. Don't make the same kind of noise. Don't have tracks or wires, don't throw sparks, don't pour sand on the tracks, don't have the same colours, don't have a bell, don't let down a step like a trolley does!"

"Hey, that's right," said Charlie. "I always get a kick watching a trolley let down the step, like an accordion."

"Sure," said Douglas.

And then they were at the end of the line; the tracks, abandoned for thirty years, ran on into rolling country. In 1910 people took the trolley out to Chessman's Park with vast picnic hampers. The track still lay rusting among the hills.

"Here's where we turn round," said Charlie.

"Here's where you're wrong!" Mr. Tridden snapped the emergency generator switch. "Now!"

The trolley, with a bump and a sailing glide, swept past the city limits, turned off the street, and swooped downhill through intervals of fragrant sunlight and vast acreages of shadow that smelt of toadstools. Here and there creek waters flushed the tracks and sun filtered through trees like green glass.

They slid whispering through meadows washed with wild sunflowers, past abandoned passenger shelters empty of all save ticket-punched confetti, to follow a forest stream into a summer country, while Douglas talked. "Why, just the *smell* of a trolley, *that's* different. I been on Chicago buses; they smell funny."

"Trolleys are too slow," said Mr. Tridden. "Going to put buses on. Buses for people and buses for school."

The trolley whined to a stop. From overhead Mr. Tridden reached down huge picnic hampers. Yelling, the children helped him carry the baskets out by a creek that emptied into a silent lake, where an ancient bandstand stood crumbling into termite dust.

They sat eating ham sandwiches and fresh strawberries and waxy oranges, and Mr. Tridden told them how it had been forty years ago: the band playing on that ornate stand at night, the men pumping air into their brass horns, the plump conductor flinging perspiration from his baton, the children and fireflies running in the deep grass, the ladies with long dresses and high pompadours treading the wooden xylophone walks with men in choking collars.

There was the walk now, all softened into a fibre mush through the years. The lake was silent and blue and serene, and fish peacefully threaded the bright reeds, and the motorman murmured on and on, and the children felt it was some other year,

with Mr. Tridden looking wonderfully young, his eyes lighted like small bulbs, blue and electric.

It was a drifting, easy day, nobody rushing, and the forest all about, the sun held in one position, as Mr. Tridden's voice rose and fell, and a darning-needle sewed along the air, stitching, restitching designs both golden and invisible. A bee settled into a flower, humming and humming. The trolley stood like an enchanted calliope, simmering where the sun fell upon it. The trolley was on their hands, a brass smell, as they ate ripe cherries. The bright odour of the trolley blew from their clothes on the summer wind.

A loon flew over the sky, crying. Somebody shivered.

Mr. Tridden worked his gloves on. "Well, time to go. Parents'll think I stole you all for good."

The trolley was silent and cool-dark, like the inside of an ice-cream drugstore. With a soft green rustling of velvet buff, the seats were turned by the quiet children so they sat with their back to the silent lake, the deserted bandstand, and the wooden planks that made a kind of music if you walked down the shore on them into other lands.

Bing! went the soft bell under Mr. Tridden's foot, and they soared back over sun-abandoned, withered flower meadows, through woods, towards a town that seemed to crush the sides of the trolley with bricks and asphalt and wood when Mr. Tridden stopped to let the children out.

Charlie and Douglas were the last to stand near the opened tongue of the trolley, the folding step, breathing electricity, watching Mr. Tridden's gloves on the brass controls.

Douglas ran his fingers over the green creek moss, looked at the silver, the brass, the wine colour of the ceiling. "Well . . . So long again, Mr. Tridden."

"Good-bye, boys."

"See you around, Mr. Tridden."

"See you around."

There was a soft sigh of air; the door collapsed gently shut, tucking up its corrugated tongue. The trolley sailed slowly down the late afternoon, brighter than the sun, all tangerine, all flashing gold-and-lemon, turned a far corner, wheeling, and vanished, gone away.

"School buses." Charlie walked to the kerb. "Won't even give us a chance to be late for school. Come and get you at your front door. Never be late again in all our lives. Think of that nightmare, Doug, just think it all over."

But Douglas, standing on the lawn, was seeing how it would

be tomorrow, when the men would pour hot tar over the silver tracks so you would never know a trolley had ever run this way. He knew it would take as many years as he could think of now to forget the tracks, no matter how deeply buried.

Some morning in autumn, spring, or winter, he knew he'd wake up, and if he didn't go near the window, if he lay deep and snug and warm in his bed, he would hear it, faint and far away.

And round the bend of the morning street, up the avenue, between the even rows of sycamore, elm, and maple, in the quietness before the start of living, past his house, he would hear the familiar sounds. Like the ticking of a clock, the rumble of a dozen metal barrels rolling, the hum of a single immense dragon-fly at dawn. Like a merry-go-round, like a small electrical storm, the colour of blue lightning, coming, here, and gone. The trolley's chime. The hiss like a soda-fountain spigot as it let down and took up its step, and the starting of the dream again as on it sailed along its way, travelling a hidden and buried track to some hidden and buried destination . . .

" Play kick-the-can after supper? " asked Charlie.

" Sure," said Douglas. " Play kick-the-can."

★ ★ ★

THE CAT IN THE BAG

Sir,

. . . I have just returned from a visit to Spain where I made the short journey from Toledo to Madrid in a third-class carriage and sat opposite a couple with five children, barefoot and in rags. There was also a dog.

When the ticket collector came round, the parents failed to produce tickets for the youngest child and the dog. A great noise and argument followed and reached a point where the obstinate father invited the ticket collector to throw the child and the dog out of the window! At this I intervened and offered to pay for the dog.

That the Inglesa should choose to save the dog rather than the child so stunned everybody that the father rose to the occasion and agreed to pay for the child. Satisfied, the ticket collector departed, but not, as it happened, the victor, for the mother at once reached down among her bundles under the seat and, to my astonishment, drew out a baby!

Nor was this all. From the interior of a battered old bag she then extracted a mangy-looking cat and, with a huge grin of triumph, held it up for all to see!

Letter in The Sunday Times,
September 25, 1955

The Next to the Last Bullet

"As long as I live"—
the echo of her words scared her

by MARK DERBY

THERE was a short silence while the smart Malay constable went out and closed the door and the police lieutenant directed a glance of inquiry across his desk.

With her great eyes wide and a strand of her hair drawn up into the slip-stream of the big ceiling fan, she didn't look altogether real. She was afraid that to the young police officer she maybe didn't appear altogether sane.

He said, a little stiff and aloof in his smart tropical uniform, "Sit down, and tell me what it is we can do for you."

Martha's slim body was stiff in the rattan chair for a moment; then she relaxed. But consciously. She relaxed with an effort, and the effort was more obvious than the relaxation. "Over and over again I've told myself that I must be imagining things, that I'm new to Singapore, new to the East and—and lonely this past month."

"You don't know anybody here?"

"Only Davy's friends. And now they . . ." She sighed and started again. "Davy Hunter is my fiancé. I came out five weeks ago to marry him, but he had to go off and straighten out some trouble on one of his company's estates in Sumatra. He comes back tomorrow, and we were going to be married the day after."

"But not now?" The officer blinked uncertainly.

"No," she said quietly. "I'm afraid that I may not be alive by then."

He blinked again and threw a glance back at the racket and white shoes in the corner behind his desk and another out through the window at the black monsoon cloud that had been piling up for an hour. Martha realized that her entrance just before he was due to leave his office might have lost him his game that evening. She made an effort to be brief. "You asked about my friends here. Well, you'll know about them already, I expect."

He said, " I don't know anything. I only came back from leave yesterday."

" But you saw *that*." She pointed to a headline on the front page of the *Straits Times* on his desk: POLICE SEARCH FOR MISSING OFFICER.

He frowned at the news story for a moment and then said, " You have some information for us about Commander Milne—is that it? "

" I only know he's dead," she said. " Murdered. I don't know where you'll find his body. Perhaps you won't."

With a glance of resignation towards his racket and white shoes, the lieutenant said, " Try putting me in the picture, will you? "

" The only friends I had in Singapore," she began again, " took me to a party three weeks ago. Andrew Carson and Rob and Rosemary Milne. It was somewhere beyond Johore Bahru at a planter's bungalow, a sort of farewell party to Andrew Carson, who was sailing for home next day. We drove back across the Causeway not long after midnight and turned up the road to the Milnes' bungalow. And halfway along the road it happened."

A sentry marched past the window, his proud Malay profile dark against the glare of the sinking sun.

" A girl dashed across the road under our wheels just as if she'd never heard the car or seen the lights. Andrew swerved, and we all fell sideways, and then he stopped and he went back with Rob. They could see nobody and we drove on. Next day we saw in the papers that an Indian girl named Lakshami had been injured when a car ran her down along that road soon after midnight and had died before morning. The police were asking the driver to come forward."

His eyes made no response to the tension in hers.

" But that evening Andrew asked us all to his hotel and told us he'd decided not to go to the police unless we insisted. Why? Well, he'd just finished three years of dodging terrorist ambushes and fighting communist bandits on a rubber estate in Selangor. His boat was sailing next day, and if he missed it while the police completed their inquiries and the inquest was held he wouldn't get another booking for weeks.

" He was a sick man, and the doctors who'd ordered him home wouldn't let him fly. So we agreed to keep quiet. As Andrew said, how would coming forward have helped anybody?

" And it was the girl's own fault, definitely. She didn't give him a chance; she ran out of the trees in front of us like a mad thing."

Martha closed her eyes. " I can see her now, like a shot from

a colour film. A beautiful face, with hair blacker than darkness and a gold skin and a gold sari and the most amazing eyes. I only saw her for a split second, but I'll remember her as long as I live."

Her hands went suddenly rigid. *As long as I live.* The echo of her own words had scared her. Then she made the deliberate effort again, and her hands relaxed.

"So Andrew embarked on the *Chusan* next morning. But that was as far as he got. He was taken ill suddenly while we were seeing him off, and died in the ambulance that came to take him to the hospital. Some sort of food poisoning."

He only nodded to her to go on.

"Death by misadventure, they said. And they said it again the week after, when Rosemary Milne was drowned in her own swimming-pool. Perfect health, no sign of a struggle, but drowned in five feet of water, while her husband wrote letters twenty yards away. There was a gardenia hedge between him and the pool, so Rob didn't see the murderer creep up while Rosemary drowsed on the water, the way she always did, and seize her ankles and pull her silently under."

Her eyes challenged the unbelief in his.

"So that's how I know Rob Milne is dead. He's been murdered. By the man who murdered Andrew and Rosemary. The man who's going to murder me."

"You mean, the husband of the Indian girl who was killed?"

"Yes." She added, "He'd only been married to her two days. His name is Daya Ram. He was a clerk at the East India Bank."

But he didn't even write down the name of the man who was going to murder her. Instead he found a formula that would get her off his hands. He gave her the name and address of a senior officer. "He's the man you want to see. He'll know all about your case."

Just as she'd told herself a hundred times, the police wouldn't believe her. By the time she was outside, down on the hot pavement again, she had forgotten the senior officer's name . . .

Her flat was unbearable, the flat that was to have been home for Davy and her. One glance around the living-room was enough to assure her that she could not spend that night there. She moved straight from the door to the telephone, called the Raffles Hotel, and asked for a single room for one night.

But the Raffles was fully booked. So were the only other hotels she knew of. She was near panic, when inspiration came suddenly. She called the Tanjong Ruh Nursing Home and asked for Jean Sanderson.

They put her through at once, and Martha pictured Jean, lying in bed, surrounded by flowers and books and the white phone, and piles of letters from friends, not really ill but loving the ease of the fashionable nursing home after a month of non-stop parties celebrating her return from England. Martha had met her on the boat.

After Jean had replied at length to her opening inquiry, Martha asked, "Jean, I want to stay there, too. Can I come tonight?"

"Darling, I thought you sounded rather diminuendo," Jean exclaimed. "But there's not a hope. This place is always booked up weeks ahead. I only got in because four patients died in a row."

Martha closed her eyes and shivered, despite the choking heat of the gathering storm. It hadn't broken yet, and the piled-up suspense of the swollen clouds hanging in the darkness above the island was grimly oppressive.

The next moment she suddenly started telling Jean everything. Loneliness and fading courage had sprung the impulse on her, but the long silence as she came to a breathless finish told her she was going to regret it.

"But, darling—" Jean cried out at last, "oh, of course it was terrible for you, losing two friends in tragic accidents one after the other, but if you let it prey on your mind like this you'll end up by taking these gruesome nightmares seriously. Really you mustn't!"

Martha didn't protest. Somehow she had half known that Jean wouldn't be convinced, any more than the police officer had been.

"But I can't stay here, Jean," she declared unsteadily. "The hotels are all full, and now I've no friends left. Only you."

Hesitantly Jean said, "There's my flat, darling, in Snowden Court. You're welcome to go there, if it helps at all."

"Oh yes!" Martha snatched at the offer. "May I tonight? Now?"

"It'll be horribly cheerless," Jean warned.

"It'll be wonderful," Martha cut in. "Number 10, isn't it, and I take a taxi to Mowbray Road?"

"Get the key from the caretaker," Jean said, "and if you find your avenging bridegroom lying in wait behind the kitchen door be sure to call me up and say good-bye before he gets down to the strangling!"

With a breathless feeling of relief Martha rang off, ordered a taxi, collected a few night things and Davy's photo from her bedroom, and fled.

For the next half-hour she methodically covered up her trail, using four taxis, side-tracking and back-tracking like a hunted

fox. When finally she let herself into Jean's fourth-floor flat she slammed the door and leaned against it in the darkness, her heart racing, her limbs trembling in the relief of escape.

For the night she was safe. Nobody could possibly have tracked her through the web she had spun. And even if her enemy were a yard behind her, the lock and bolt on the stout door would save her. The sheer drop below the windows would defeat anything without wings.

For tonight she was safe and tomorrow Davy would be back. Like a prisoner reprieved on the scaffold, she whispered a small prayer of thankfulness and then her hand found the light switch and flicked it down.

Nothing happened.

She tensed again in the dark room, but realized almost at once that the electricity would have been turned off at the main switch when Jean left for the nursing home. That didn't entirely relax her tension, though. Groping for the master switch in the back quarters of the unfamiliar flat was something her body refused to attempt until she had gathered all her resolution.

And then, just as she took a step forward, the storm at last opened its preliminary bombardment. There was a blinding flash, followed almost immediately by a clap of thunder like a planet exploding. But it was neither the flash nor the thunderclap that sent her reeling back against the door again. It was the shadow she had glimpsed in the dark cave beyond the open kitchen door.

She felt safety snatched from her, like a fur coat snatched from naked shoulders in a blizzard. She didn't know if what she had seen was real or imaginary; she only knew she hadn't nerve enough to go into that kitchen.

There was a second lightning flash and it showed her the dark space beyond the kitchen door was empty. So it had been imagination. But her sigh of relief was interrupted by something that hurled her back into terror again.

The big white electric lamp over her head flashed on.

In the same moment the storm burst like a gigantic hose turned on the building. She stood blinking in the sudden light, realizing that somebody must have thrown the master switch in the kitchen. And then he appeared in the doorway.

The picture of him she had built up in her mind had been uncannily true. Those fine eyes, shadowed with suffering and lighted with crazy hatred, were not the eyes of a stranger. The handsome face, brown under the rich black hair, was one she had glimpsed in a hundred waking nightmares.

Even his voice, raised above the roar of the deluge, was like a remembered voice. " We will go into that room, Miss Langley."

The revolver in his right hand gestured toward the sitting-room door. She obeyed like a woman walking in her sleep. In the long sitting-room she took the chair he indicated and faced him across a small table on which stood a vase of dead spider lilies, and the skeleton key he must have used to get in.

He looked at her, like a man face to face with destiny, and said nothing.

" Daya Ram? " It was no question, really, and needed no answer.

He said only, " You understand, then."

She nodded slowly. She did understand. The grief, the loneliness, the fury, and then the madness. She understood it all.

He said, " I spent this afternoon in your flat, Miss Langley. I intended to have our little talk there, but when I heard you arrange with a friend to spend the night here, I decided to come over and wait for you. Here we shall not be disturbed."

" Disturbed? "

" If we are disturbed I shall have to cut our interview short." Breaking the revolver, he showed her two of the six chambers loaded. He looked down at the brass bases of the two bullets as if they were jewels, and murmured dreamily, " One for you and then the other for me." After he'd closed the weapon again he said, " But first I want to talk to you."

" And I want to talk to *you*," Martha managed to say clearly. " You have murdered three friends of mine and now you want to murder me. What do you get out of it all? "

" Leave to die," he answered quietly, the liquid accent in his dreamy voice making the words sound like a line from a poem. " Leave to die."

The roaring madness of the storm outside almost drowned the quiet madness of his words. She found herself shaking her head and sighing, " None of them believed me."

" The police? " His full lips were contemptuous. " The police never helped me to find my wife's murderers, and today, when you went to them, you found they would not help you. I'll tell you why. They thought you were mad. They thought I was mad, too."

She shivered, but nerved herself to say, " Why do you call me and my friends murderers? You know that isn't true."

He said in his far-away voice, " I know my Lakshami is in her grave, and I know who was responsible."

" She was responsible herself," Martha protested. " She ran out right under our wheels. She must have been crazy."

He nodded. " Perhaps. Crazy with fear. An animal had attacked her in the darkness, a vile beast who had long desired her and hated her for her marriage to me. She escaped from him onto that road."

" Then isn't *he* your enemy? Isn't *he* responsible? If you must have revenge, why not on him? "

A naked light flashed in the fine eyes as he answered her. " He was the first—"

" Mr. Carson was driving carefully. He tried to avoid her, but there wasn't time. How can you blame us? "

" I only know," the soft voice lifted a little above a growl of thunder, " that I was the happiest man in the world and that now I am the unhappiest, and you and your friends are the cause."

She was silent. He was so far beyond any reasoning she could advance. He had made a vow to wipe out those he judged responsible for the death of his bride and then he would kill himself. Already there was a sort of exaltation about him; the longed-for moment of release from life was so close. Within ten minutes now she would be dead, and he, released from his vow, would have leave to die at last.

When the telephone bell cut suddenly through the uproar of the storm Martha started violently and for some seconds they stared at each other while the bell rang on.

" You may answer it," he said then.

She rose and crossed to the small table where the telephone stood and picked up the receiver.

It was Jean. " Well, darling," came the bright, teasing voice, " was he lurking with murder in his eyes as I said? "

" Yes, Jean," she replied, " exactly as you said."

" Darling, you sound so odd." Jean's tone had changed. " Honestly, I don't like the idea of your being alone in that flat, so listen. Matron says I can break rules and have you along for a drink. Now."

Martha took a deep breath and said, " Afraid I can't come, Jean dear. Maybe they'll let you have my glass too, and you could drink it for me. And when you see Davy, say hullo from me and all my love."

She rang off. Only for a second had the phone seemed to offer a chance of rescue. Then she had realized that the moment she started calling for help the bullet would smack through her back. Even if help arrived, even if it got as far as the door, there would be only two bodies, still warm, on the Kashmiri carpet when the door opened.

When she sat again at the small table, in obedience to his gesture, there was a photograph lying on it between them. Once

again Martha saw the flowerlike beauty of the face that had shot into the headlights of Andrew's car. Daya Ram was gazing at it with such consuming adoration that she could not bear to see it.

She asked, " Where is Commander Milne? "

" At the bottom of the sea," he told her. " I arranged a sailor's death for him."

" Poor Rob! " Her voice trembled. " And poor Rosemary! They had only two months together."

" We had only two days," he said softly.

" And you're not allowing me even that." As his dark brows rose in inquiry, she told him, " I was to have been married the day after tomorrow."

His eyes stared deep into hers. " Then you understand."

" Yes," she said, and that was true. She was learning now what loss meant, loss of all that gave life meaning. She felt strangely close to him, to his broken heart if not to his broken mind. She felt no hatred any more and now, suddenly, even her fear lost its sharpest edge. The first inklings of a plan were stirring in the dark coils of her mind.

The storm was moving south. From a distance over the harbour came a few muffled thunderclaps, like the sobs of a small child who has stopped crying. The downpour had lost its violence. To hope for help had been useless from the first. But could she yet help herself?

He looked at his watch. " Two minutes more and the moon will rise," he said. " Then will be the moment for us to die. I made my vow as the moon rose and that is when I shall carry out the last details of it."

Martha had a plan now, but had she nerve enough to stage it? She felt as if she were clinging to a narrow ledge over an abyss while violent winds fought to throw her down.

After closing her eyes and asking for strength, she said, looking down at the photo of Lakshami, " I think she must have loved you very much." She stole a glance at him. He held his left wrist arched, and something told her that it was now the second-hand of his watch that he was frowning over so closely.

The revolver rose and pointed at her breast.

" I think," she went on, still gazing down at the photo, " she must have been thinking of you at the moment that picture was taken. Don't you think so? "

And yes, she had guessed correctly. His eyes could not resist the photograph, the face he had loved so tragically. They turned for a last glance of agonized tenderness at its delicate beauty, and in that instant Martha acted.

She sprang forward and, armed with despairing strength,

seized the gun. Before he could snap out of his trance and summon his reserve of maniacal strength, the black gun had been wrested from his hold. Martha, closing her eyes, aimed it at the window and fired a single shot.

A single shot. Then, as he came at her with his mad, tragic face contorted, she turned the gun round and held it out to him.

When he snatched it from her she spun round, closed her eyes again, clamped her hands over her ears, and whispered, " Good-bye, Davy," in case it was good-bye.

Suspense then, tearing a great wound in her consciousness for three terrible seconds, and then she stiffened at the report of the second shot.

A sob like a small child's burst from her, and she stumbled to the door, blind with tears and groping desperately for the lock . . .

" You took a fearful chance," the gruff police officer protested when she'd told her story half an hour later. " A fearful chance. Passing a loaded gun to a homicidal maniac and turning your back on him! Why didn't you throw it out of the window? Or hold him up with it till my chaps got there? They'd just pulled up their patrol car outside when you fired; after Mrs. Sanderson rang the station I sent them along to see how you were."

Martha said, " I understood him, you see. He had two shots left—one for revenge and the other for death. And I was sure he wanted death more than revenge, if he couldn't have both. It seems an odd thing to say after what he did to my friends, but when the time came I wanted to help him. So I fired the shot he'd intended for me and—and gave him back the bullet he'd saved for himself. Surely he's better off now than he would be waiting to be condemned to a lifetime in a madhouse."

" He was mad, all right," the officer put in grimly.

" It wasn't his mind I understood," she said quietly, " but his heart. That was broken, too." He didn't look sympathetic enough for her to complete her explanation. It was quite a simple one, in fact. Merely that she loved as Daya Ram had loved.

And that night, she had taken out again the golden future she had folded away. She saw it stretch magically before her—the future with Davy. And she drifted smiling into sleep, smiling on a tear-stained pillow.

Tears for three friends . . . and one enemy.

★ ★ ★

VOLT IN THE DOSE

A cold is both positive and negative; sometimes the Eyes have it and sometimes the Nose.

A la mode

It is charming to totter into vogue

HORACE WALPOLE, 1765

Rozzie was bigger than ever since the war, and her clothes worse. She was all in crimson and mauve that day and when she asked me what I thought of her dress and I said it was striking, at least, she answered me that it was a mistake. "I got it on Monday in a fit of the cheerfuls, and I knew it was awful. But at least it makes a splash."

JOYCE CARY, *Herself Surprised*

Shooting A-Line

I'm not the type to tear my hair
Or spend the evening swearing
Because some female chanced to wear
The Dress That I Am Wearing.
Unless—and this has always been
The problem in such cases—
The other dame's fits better in
The more befitting places.

PHILENE HAMMER, *Unreasonable Facsimile*

Shady Practice

The Princess de Metternich remained a faithful client of Worth's and was often in Paris, although she came now as a private visitor and no longer played so brilliant a part as in the past. Jean Worth describes how she visited his father one day during the MacMahon administration. Worth asked her if she intended to go to the races at Longchamps the next day, and she

replied that she would not be able to do so as she had no suitable dress with her, only a black one. Worth thought for a moment, and then had an idea. He found and gave her a parasol in a brilliant shade of poppy-red, and said he thought that if she took it with her she could very well go in her black dress. The next day, therefore, although the weather was hot and sunny, the Princess attended the races in black, carrying the bright sunshade. The outfit set all society talking, and in due course she found she had once again created a fashion: for before long poppy-red parasols were to be seen all over Paris.

EDITH SAUNDERS, *The Age of Worth*

Quick Change

In Dress and Love by like desires
Is Woman's heart perplext;
The Man and the Gown she one Day admires,
She wishes to change the next.

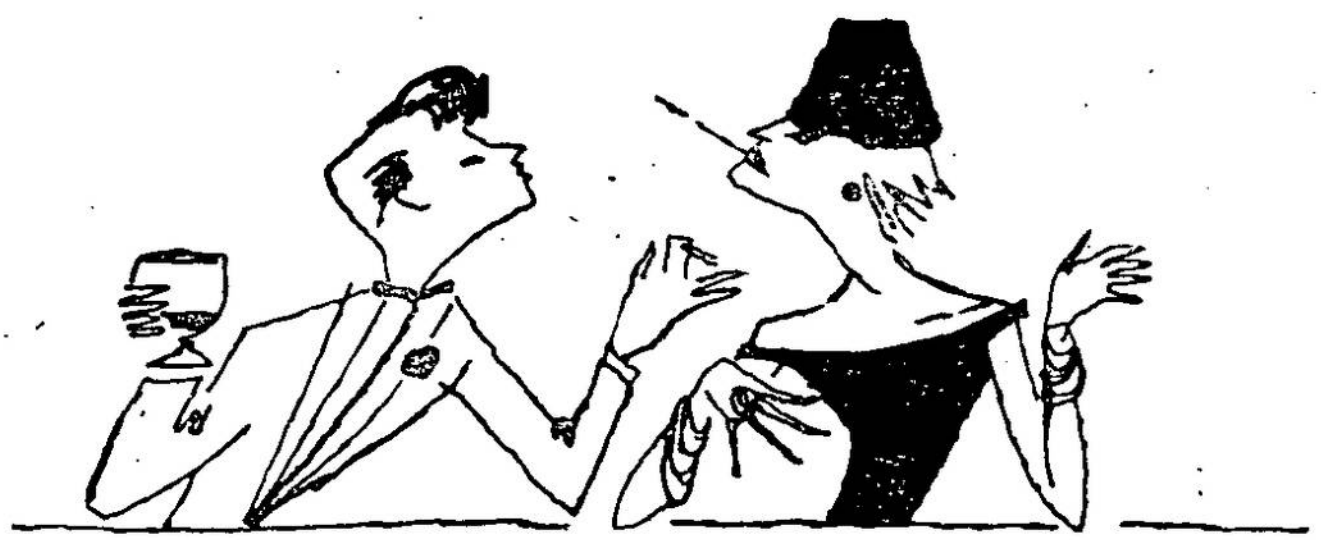
JOHN GAY, *Achilles: an Opera*

Feminine Approach

After three boys, Pop was awfully tickled at begetting a female; I don't know just why. He enjoyed going to stores with me to buy girls' clothes. It was comical to hear him consulting old black Myrtle about what I ought to wear. I overheard her: "Dat chile gwine to be handsome, you should doll her up a bit. Get her some frou-frou." This did me good till I heard the old man say: "She ain't female at all. She looks just like me from the waist up, she's got no more shape than a cricket bat."

Out of the steam of the washtubs Myrtle said: "Shape'll come. Dey bulges here and dey bulges dere, all of a sudden dey's real pleasurable."

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY, *Kitty Foyle*



Court Favours

As for thy paynted pale, and wrinckles surfled up:
Are dear inough, for such as lust to drinke of ev'ry cup:
Thy bodies bolstred out, with bumbast and with bagges,
Thy rowles, thy ruffes, thy caules, thy coyfes, thy jerkins and thy jaggs.
Thy curling and thy cost, thy frisling and thy fare,
To Court to court with al those toyes, and there set forth such ware
Before their hungrie eyes, that gaze on every gest:
And chuse the cheapest chaffayre still, to please their fansie best.

GEORGE GASCOIGNE, *A Hundreth sundrie Flowres*, 1573

Hot Pursuit

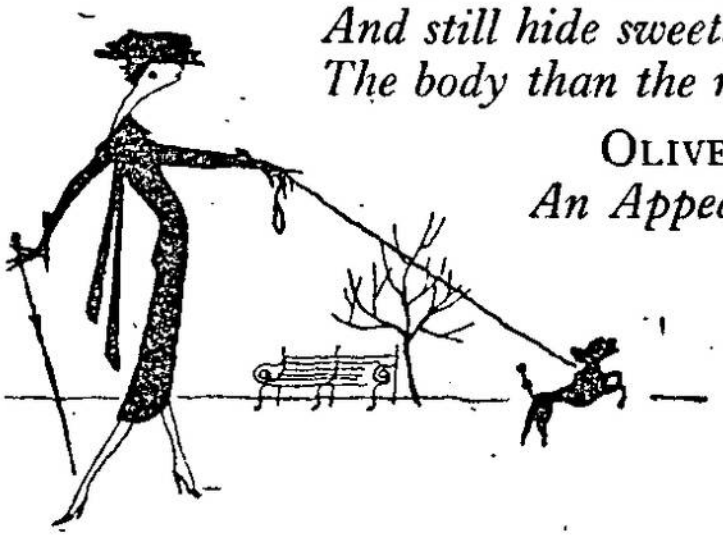
A slightly more up-to-date and down-to-earth etiquette book . . . proved, when consulted, to be addressed to a " you " with whom I had difficulty in identifying myself. It seems that if I am " going places after work " I can take from my attaché case a sequin bow and a belt with a matching sequin ornament at the back, and then if I add a veil to my little matching hat, and transfer to my wrist the flower I have worn in my lapel all day, I can pass mustard in any smart grill.

DANIEL GEORGE, *Lonely Pleasures*

Bare Truth

Paris lived too soon to see
All the sights that ravish me.
I am left alone to grapple
With my love without an apple:
So I sing by her inspired,
Her whose beauty when attired
By good taste can well outdo
All that nude Idalian crew
And still hide sweets; for more, I wis,
The body than the raiment is.

OLIVER ST. JOHN GOGARTY,
An Appeal from the Judgment of Paris



Call of the Lake

In every lagoon and waterway
the young ones dabbled and tipped

by EDMUND GILLIGAN

ALL morning long, in the last flight of the migration towards the Canadian nesting-grounds, the wedge of wild geese had flown high above Maqua, her white-breasted mate, and their nine companions. Twice in the final hour, the wedge had slanted down to be nearer the lakes and marshes of the prairies. Time and again, Maqua had heard the wearied leader of the geese call up the next in line to the task of breaking a passage against the head wind. The passage of the pintails was so fast that they forged far ahead of the geese while the wedge was changing.

At noon, the geese caught up with Maqua again. At that moment, the horizon changed from the rusty green of springtime to dark blue. It was the blue of lake water rippling under the sun. The geese changed course instantly. Their honking cries redoubled and became cries of exultation. Maqua called out loudly to her mate, and the pintails, too, swung westward.

A swirl of white cloud screened the sun. It broke into skeins, and the burst of fresh light poured brilliantly across the plain of Alberta, the homeland from which the second gale of last November had driven them all, ducks and geese alike, to the rice flats of the Hudson, the bays of Long Island, and thence to warmer havens in the South, in Mexico and in the West Indies.

It was from Cuba that Maqua had come with her mate, compelled by an instinct that made her long for the reeds of home. In those thousands of miles, her wings beating night and day, she had lost some of her beauty and strength, for she could neither eat nor drink to satisfaction because of her strong desire for something to be found only in the marsh where she had been born a season past. Her breast had thinned and its buff sheen had faded in places to a rusty stain. Black streaks showed in the cinnamon bars of her wings. Even the iron blue of her bill had taken on a greyish tinge.

Yet her copper-hued eyes had not lost their brightness. The strength of her determination revealed itself in an unchanging glow, golden and fierce in her search of the wilderness beneath.

Tuned to the courage of her indomitable heart, her wings struck even faster as her course changed to the changing set of the long, pin-pointed tail feathers, the pintail that gave her that name among the men who watched her flight across the hemisphere and now awaited her in the marshes to which she steered.

Breaking from the V-flight that ages of such journeying had perfected, the geese strung out and began to soar. Their shouts echoed in the sky and became part of a chorus that filled the earth with its clamour. The geese called to those above and greeted those below, shooting their inquiries like bugle calls. The hens in the marshes called to the ganders in the sky, and the ganders replied.

The geese wheeled and scattered. Maqua soared, her companions swerved towards her and began their own outcry, and she cried again when, at last, the image in her memory found its match in the marshes below.

She called to her mate. She rested on her wings, floated in a long slant to the lagoon, and came down heavily on the water. It splashed over her back. She thrust her bill into its coolness, drank, thrust three times with her webs and slid into the shelter of rushes that curled in a greenish gall over the water. She tucked her head under the left wing and slept.

Stretched out, hidden under the trees, a man watched Maqua in her sleep. For half an hour he kept his field-glasses on her hiding-place. He then put down her name in a notebook—Maqua, the Pintail—and he wrote the date and hour of her arrival and the circumstances in which she had come down out of the crowded sky.

All that night and until noon of the next day, Maqua slept. The warmth of the sun strengthened her and, in the afternoon, awakened her.

She swam out a few strokes, beat her wings lustily in the open water and began to feed greedily. She thrust her beak into clusters of sedge grass and smartweed, green under the green wave of rushes. She drank many times and moved deeper into the reeds, where she found, in pockets of turf and loam, the water plantain and the lilies that she especially loved in their early stages. She ate until her breast swelled, until her movements became almost ungainly, and she slept again.

Twice in the night, uproars in the marsh disturbed her. The silence came again, yet her old uneasiness had returned.

She raised her head from its wing and glided out into the moonlight. There she called, a low-pitched, piercing note. It was an expression of her uneasiness, and yet a strange call to her, one never made before, even in the Cuban bay when she had

chosen her mate out of the beautiful swanlike ring of dancers ranged around her. There were many such calls in the shadows around her and, in reply, there came louder notes, mysterious to her and, like her own call, not understood.

Until sunrise, Maqua floated alone in her pool, not caring to eat. The morning flight to the lake passed in a clatter of wings and a clamour of voices uttering new cries that made her snap her beak in a meaningless clack. When other hens swam by, intent on their own errands, she followed a few strokes as if she might find in their actions an answer to her own mystery. But those other birds did not welcome her.

After a little while, Maqua paddled back to the hummock of grass and bulrushes. She stopped at the water's edge to gaze at the tiny island which had drawn her from the skies. It had a new meaning to her, a stronger one, and quite unlike the meaning it had when she first spied it.

She swam around it, pushing the reeds aside to walk quietly in its shallows. On its farther side she saw where a great tree had fallen. The force of its fall had broken many boughs and had driven the shorn trunk so deep into the marsh that it had formed a bridge from the prairie to her hummock. The water ran so high that it flowed over the trunk.

Maqua turned to paddle under the trunk, where it rested on the bank: then she chose a passage directly over the submerged part. Once over, she came around and looked a long time at that bridge. It, too, had a meaning that she could not unravel.

Her hunger began to hurt her. Nevertheless, something stronger than hunger compelled her to clamber into the shelter of the hummock. For a moment, Maqua stood there, erect and graceful.

Abruptly, almost savagely, she changed into another creature. In that one instant, her immemorial instinct warned her that she must no longer go carelessly from sunlight to shadow, from reeds to pool. She must not be observed in that shelter.

So her heart gave its warning, and she crouched. She gathered up her feet close to her breast, so that the marks of her webs and claws should not be left in the soft earth. She stretched out her neck into a straight line. Her eyes became golden again in a return of her fierceness.

This change bewildered her. In confusion, she stayed a moment where she lay: then she glided forward on her breast. It was the motion of a serpent, another turning-back of her instinct to the time when her kind was changing, in feet, wings, and beak, from the primordial shape, designed for the slime. At this moment, she became almost frightful in appearance.

She pressed forward to the very centre of the island. There she found the thing she had come so far to see.

It was only an empty hollow in the grass, where shreds of buff-coloured down, shrivelled by the winter's snow and ice, clung to a vague pattern of broken straws.

It was almost nothing, yet for Maqua its wretchedness appeared as a glowing image and the remembrance of warmth, tenderness, struggle, and joy. She rose to her graceful height again and looked down in such contentment that her joy became intense once more, so intense that she cried out her note of beseechment.

Maqua did not know, and could not know it, yet this was the nesting-place where her own mother, a spring since, had cherished her ten eggs and had hatched the flight that, just now, had come home again. Countless thousands of square miles of land and water had passed under Maqua in her flight. Nevertheless, the need within her breast had drawn her down to this square foot of bent grass.

Maqua became animated. In a housewifely fashion she began to bustle about, poking here and there at the down of fallen rushes, at the spears of dried grass. She removed the old down and the broken straws and swept the nest clean with blows of her wings. She laid her bill on her own breast, gazed a little while down her beak to wait for understanding, and then, in rapid plunges and jerks of her beak, she tore out from her breast her own buff-coloured down.

She made her home. She smoothed its sides, and surveyed it carefully. She pulled out more tufts of her down and filled in the bare places. She walked around it and looked at it critically from the other side.

At last, she entered the nest and noted with satisfaction that she filled it exactly, and she learnt, at once, that the down and feathers of her plump breast were becoming quite warm. For a little while, she lay there, moving slowly from side to side in a rocking motion. Strangely, she faded from sight. Her muted colours became the colours of the earth. She thrust her head under her right wing and became drowsy. She slept. In this sleep, she sleepily uttered that beseeching cry.

This time her cry drew an answer.

The answer came gently through the rushes, where the drake had been feeding. Even more elegant and beautiful, his dazzling hues restored by his own foraging, the drake fanned in the water and nimbly stood upon it, his breast gleaming in flashes of ivory light. He called to her through the rushes. When she failed to answer, he sailed vigorously towards her, pushed aside the screen before her nest and cried out to her again in the same

accent that pierced the clamour all around them. Maqua rose from the nest, slid down into the water, and held out her clacking bill to his bill.

By the first of May, when the summer blew with shining warmth across the marshes, Maqua lay at ease on her first clutch of eggs, ten ovals of delicate shell, a pale olive-blue in colour. For two full days and nights she lay there, never stirring, eyes and heart intent.

At the end of that time, knowing that life had come to her children, she rose gently, stood upright in the nest, and turned each egg over with gentle pushes of her bill.

This done, she warmed the eggs again a full day and a night, and at noon she rose again. She now stepped out of the nest and gathered stray curls of down and tiny feathers and laid each one over the eggs. She plucked down from her breast and skilfully hid the eggs from the eyes of egg-eating enemies.

She slid down into the water, drank, gossiped a bit with her mate, and stayed in the water until it had soaked into her feathers, now too dry.

She rolled to right and to left until the water gleamed on her wings and clung to their dusky linings. She returned to her nest and shook drops of water over her eggs, because she knew that already the health of those within required such moistening and such cooling. Under the approving glances of her husband, she uncovered the eggs again and settled her cooled breast against them.

For the first time, the drake spent the night close to the nest. At times he spoke to her in a low voice of assurance: at times, he stood up in anger when a wailing outcry broke the murmur of the vast nesting-ground. He beat his wings mightily to show that he was ready to defend Maqua and the little ones that twenty more nights would bring forth.

All this time, the man had been keeping watch over Maqua. He had seen her line her nest, had heard her call to the drake and, once, when she had gone into the water to drink, he had come over the tree-trunk to see the covered eggs.

Now, on the fourth day, he came to her at noon. She heard his approach and shrank in fear.

He spoke to her gently and laid down a basket also lined with the down of pintails.

"Maqua!" he whispered. "Maqua!" His voice held a note of regret.

She cried out and heaved herself up in her nest. She called in anguish to her drake and he cried out in fury and clashed his

glossy wings. She ran to his side, and he, his courage beaten down by hopelessness, retreated to the water, summoning her to flight.

The man said, " I don't like to do it, Maqua, but I must."

He gently took up her ten eggs and placed them in his basket. He turned away and called her again and said, " Come, now! It isn't quite as bad as it seems."

All day, all night, Maqua grieved by her robbed nest, and cried a note of desolation, unlike any she had uttered before. The drake came to her. She struck angrily at him, beat him with her wings, and cried on, unconsoled by all that he had to say. She had lost her children, and her heart longed for them.

At times, she could not accept her loss as the truth. Far out in the prairies, where she wandered aimlessly in her sorrow, her hope would overcome her knowledge and she would turn hastily towards the nest.

When she came out of the water, she sank close to the earth as before and glided forward to the empty hollow. There she rose out of the stealthy posture, needless now, and became a bird again, and uttered her lament.

Her drake stayed with her all this time. It was not his part to share the nest duty, as some birds do, yet he had never gone far, and now would not go. He seemed to understand her grief, and often, when she hurried home, she would find him there alone, his brown eyes gloomily fixed on that empty hollow. He comforted her as best he could and, in a few days, he asserted his drakeship, his rights as a good husband, who must be faithful and cheerful.

As in the beginning, when he had come to her with the rivals in that Cuban bay and had proudly displayed the beauty of his breast and the swan-like splendour of his wings, so he now swam and waltzed before her. He trod water nimbly and with grace, arched his long neck, and repeated the wooing notes. He rested his bluish bill against the whiteness of his breast and gazed at her, waiting for her cheerfulness to return.

He waited and wooed her until, at last, she changed her grieving note to the gentler accent by which she had chosen him from the other drakes so long ago.

By the middle of May, when the widgeon and teal and other pintails were crying in exultation over eggs chipping beneath them, Maqua again lay in peace, over her second clutch. This time the eggs were tinged with a deeper hue of olive-green. There were eight of them. She could not wait for more. Summer was surging by, infinitely beautiful in light and warmth and promise, yet in each passing day a warning from the Pole came to Maqua.

The water had run off more than usual. The fallen tree no longer lay under the stream. The water ran an inch or two under the trunk. Many times in the nesting-season, the fox had come to that fallen tree because he wished to cross to Maqua's tiny island. He hated to touch water with his feet and would not cross even when the flow was merely a film.

Two nights after the last of the new eggs had been laid, and at the very hour that Maqua again knew how life flourished in the shells, the fox came to the bridge, delicately treading on thick strands of grass to hide his passage. It was Maqua's eggs he sought.

In the darkness before dawn, he crossed the bridge and found her. She found him at the same moment and she cried out in anguish.

He leapt clear over her nest, almost playfully, and snapped his jaws loudly at her drake and at her. She heaved herself upward and struck at him.

The marshes broke into an uproar of fear and protest. Had the ducklings been there, chirping in fear, Maqua would have died in their defence, for their helplessness would have driven her to his jaws in hatred and defiance. Now she could only cry out and flee before him. She ran to the wings of her mate.

The fox lay down by the nest, cracked the eggs one by one, and lapped up the living yolks. He enjoyed his meal. Shooting his tongue into each one in turn, he emptied the shells and then cleaned his paws.

The sun had come up during his feasting. He trotted off towards the bridge, meaning to return to his den for a comfortable sleep.

Halfway across the tree, a strange sound, a tick of sound rose clearly amidst the waning cries of the waterfowl. He turned his head towards that sound, which had come out of the upheaved roots of the tree.

His eye caught a gleam, a reddish fire shooting out there. Another sound, fierce and emphatic, came hurtling from the cover. In the same instant, the bullet drove into his heart.

The man who had robbed Maqua's first nesting came running out of the rushes, his rifle ready. He stopped over the body of the fox, where it lay twisted in the broken boughs. He hurried across the bridge and approached Maqua's nest.

When he saw the pretty fragments of her shells, he cried out in distress. He cleaned out the nest and put the fragments in his pocket. Once more he wrote Maqua's name in his notebook. Next to it, he wrote the word, *fox*. He called out her name. "Maqua! Maqua!"

Maqua lay hidden in the rushes, her head tucked under her wing.

By the end of May the full summer blew back and forth across the nesting-grounds. The winds off the lake became warmer, and the ripples in the tall grasses and in the reeds were no longer rough and boisterous.

The songbirds stayed silent on their nests, hidden by full-leafed boughs. Under the trees, the grouse danced loudly in the last of their mating rituals. The morning flights of geese and ducks were smaller now. Only the ganders and the drakes flew to the prairies and to the lake for the feasts, more abundant than ever.

And an endless chorus of new music arose from the hundreds and thousands of goslings and ducklings that had been hatched and were now preparing for the life of the marshes, the life of the long flight that they must take a summer hence, when the lake winds changed to briskness and the edges of the lake began to freeze. In every turn of the lagoons, in every pool and waterway, the mothers sailed gaily along, quacking to their broods, and the young ones dabbled and tipped awkwardly in imitation of their elders.

Maqua lay deep in her nest. Neither man nor fox had conquered her. She was not to be defeated. There were only six eggs beneath her beautiful breast now, and these were even richer in colour, this time a delicate buff hue.

Life had come to these eggs, and happiness had come again to her. Her mate was with her. The gathering of the other drakes meant nothing to him. Now and then he answered their carefree calls and watched them slanting down to the rich waters of the lakes and the feasts of the prairies. At night he sat close to her, and in the darkness they exchanged low signals.

The first week ended, the second passed, and the last began. On the twenty-third night, just before dawn, a chipping, scraping sound under her breast made her stir.

She felt an egg move slightly. She drew her legs up a little and waited. A shell broke, and at once something small and wet pushed out into the thick, warm down of her breast. She lifted her head, curved her neck, and listened.

She spoke to the drake and he crept nearer. There came another scraping, and delicate tappings in the warmth and silence of her nest. She could feel the shells part, could feel the pushing to and fro, and then she heard a louder cheeping. She lifted herself again, ever so lightly, and parting the down of her breast, a tiny bill appeared directly beneath her own.

The bill appeared, opened, and closed, and the pretty head thrust out into the world of light. Maqua gracefully bent her head and touched her beak to the beak of her little one.

Another shell parted beneath her in that darkness. One by one, the new beings chirped and turned upward towards the light. They pushed and climbed a little, rested and cried out to her again. They dried their moist down in the dryness of her feathers, climbed upward again, and pushed out their little heads.

In joy she greeted them, and in joy she led them, at last, to the water. Already bold, already adventurous, the six ducklings paraded after Maqua, who led them to the side of her handsome, preening mate.

At noon of the next day Maqua felt her island tremble under the downward thrust of the tree-trunk. Someone had stepped on the bridge.

It was the man, bearing a noisy basket on his arm. He knew Maqua would not now flee from him. He came up gently to her and clucked to her. Her ducklings had gone under her at her first signal. They lay snug and silent in the darkness and waited for this mystery to come and go.

The man came close to Maqua. "Are you hungry, Maqua?" He scattered a handful of corn near her nest.

She rose to attack him, to strike him with her beak and wings. Before she could rise clear of her ducklings, he had caught her skilfully and had slipped a metal band around her leg. It bore her name and a date and the name of a society of sportsmen that employed him. It also bore Maqua's various dates and carried, too, the brand of her indomitable heart, of the instinct not to be denied: *Nested three times.* It was their way of looking after Maqua and her kind, their way of learning the ways Maqua had learnt ages since.

Maqua snatched up a kernel of corn. She liked it. She gobbled another. Just the same, she did not trust him. She backed away and collected her brood with one loud call. They obeyed and trooped after her into the water. They struck out boldly in her wake.

The man laughed at her. Being safe now, she laughed back at him. He then did something that simply astonished her. He waded into the lagoon after her and knelt down in the water and tried to pretend that he was a duck too. He even quacked like the drake, who was steering round and round his family.

"Maqua!" the man called.

She waltzed around and faced him, her eyes glowing like copper again.

"That's better!"

Without another word, he reached into the basket and took out a handsome duckling who sat bolt upright in the palm of the man's hand and quacked a tiny quack right at Maqua, just as if he had a right to speak affectionately to her, the mother of six just as handsome as he, if a little smaller and downier.

The man slipped the duckling into the water and, without another quack to explain himself, he did the same thing, over and over again, until there were ten new beauties floating there, one and all turned in rather an expectant way towards Maqua.

She took a long stroke towards them and stretched out her dusky crown. She counted them. Ten! Now what did it mean? It was a familiar number. She had counted it long ago, before her nights of sorrow.

"You don't recognize them? Why, Maqua, I'm surprised! An intelligent pintail like you." He laughed at her perplexity and stepped ashore. Maqua came another stroke nearer. She even called upon her husband for advice and counsel.

The man said, "Take them, Maqua, take them! They're yours. I swear they are. You didn't think I meant to keep them?"

She came up to the nearest stranger and delicately touched its beak. At this, all the others swam briskly up to her, crowded around her and began to tell her ten wonderful stories at once about life in the incubator and the pen.

The man took another step away. "All I wanted to know, Maqua, is what you could do. And now I know. I do indeed."

Maqua waltzed round and called her last brood into line. She swam away, looking backward now and then, until her first brood, dipping and bowing, sailed right past her second family, which at once fell behind. The littlest ones couldn't keep up with their older brothers and sisters. They fell farther behind and began complaining that it wasn't fair, that she was being a bad mother to them. Maqua soon saw what the trouble was. She stopped to figure it out.

It was difficult indeed. This certainly had not happened even to a pintail, in all the ages past. She looked in a puzzled way from one family to another. Those nearer to her were so much bigger. Surely they would wish to fly long before the others.

The man crossed the bridge. He was quite content. He knew Maqua would soon solve the problem. Whatever it was, whatever others might confront her, nothing could be too much for a heart like hers.

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Budget: A mathematical confirmation of your suspicions.

A. A. LATIMER

Painted Death

The slashing of the knife tore the room in half

by WINIFRED WOLFE

BY Thursday afternoon of that week, Lily Frye was in such a state of panic that she went to her agent's office and told him she had to get out of New York City.

"O.K.," he said. "O.K., so finish out the rest of the week where you are, and I'll see what I can do for you."

"I'm not going back to the club," she said. "I quit."

"Oh, great," Lou said acidly, "great! Right before the week-end! Look, Lil—"

"I told them I was sick."

"You don't look very sick to me, Lil."

"I'm dying," she said, and then she started to cry. She didn't turn her head away or bury her face in her hands. She just sat very straight, looking out of the window over Times Square and thinking how strange and blurry everything was.

"Lil," Lou said gently, "let's have it straight."

"I've got to get out of the city. Get me a booking some place. Boston . . . Miami . . . Montreal. Just get me away from here."

"Not in any trouble with the cops, are you, Lil?"

"I'd welcome it," she said grimly.

"Man-trouble?"

Lily took a handkerchief out of her bag. "I must look a mess," she said. "I always look a mess after I've been crying."

"What does he want?"

"He wants to kill me," she said simply. "That's all. He wants to kill me. I don't want to talk about it."

"Maybe you ought to go to the police."

"I don't have anything to tell them . . . yet. When I do, it'll be too late. What can you do for me, Lou?"

He opened the loose-leaf notebook on his desk and examined it. "You remember Mike's in South Boston? I can book you in there for two weeks."

"Thanks, Lou. You're a pal. I'll leave tonight."

"Wait a minute. You won't open until a week from Monday."

"I'll go to a hotel. It's O.K. It's beautiful."

"They wanted a singer," Lou said, "but I'll fix it up. I'll tell them you've worked up a real class act."

When she left, he walked her as far as the lift. "Sure you don't want to tell me what it's all about?" he said.

She shook her head. "You'd tell me I was crazy."

Back out on Broadway, she took a deep breath and inhaled the warm smell of salted peanuts and caramel popcorn. Then she started uptown. On her way she passed a vendor selling orchids, a hawker selling cheap neckties, and a big arcade where a man in shirt-sleeves wound up little toy bears that walked drunkenly across the counters. This city's the craziest, she thought. It's so crazy and so beautiful, and if I let him kill me I'll never see it any more.

Mother, I'm scared he's going to kill me. Then she thought how corny it was, really, that every time she was scared, she called on a mother she didn't even remember.

"I'll think it out," she decided, "just the way it happened . . . from the beginning . . . and maybe then I'll find out I'm making a lot out of nothing." So she wiped her senses clean of all the sights, sounds, and smells of the city around her, kept on walking uptown, and went back to the beginning. It was like telling herself a story.

Chapter one, she thought. I meet The Geek . . .

The Geek! That's what I used to call him—that or The Beard. He was a big, shaggy animal of a man who lived in the room over mine. And he had a beard—a real honest-to-god beard that made him look even more of a character.

Every day we'd pass each other on the stairs. Usually I'd move a little closer to the banister and turn my head the other way, but I could feel him looking me over. It was like somebody giving me the evil eye.

You can't always explain why you're afraid of somebody. You just feel it so strongly, you understand it without having a real reason. But you feel sorry for him! That was something I didn't understand. That was crazy.

All of a sudden, one day, it came to me that I hadn't seen him for over a week. I missed him the way you miss a tap that drips or a radiator that gurgles. After they're fixed you sure don't want them back again, but you realize you had got used to having them around. Getting used to being afraid is like that. When there's nothing to be afraid of any more, a person feels free, and a little empty. I don't know exactly how to explain it; but when a whole week was over and I hadn't tightened up inside once at the sight of him, I felt cheated.

I asked Mrs. Keefer, the landlady, about him. "What's

happened to The Beard?" I asked her. "Did he move out? I bet it's been a week since I saw him."

She was sorting the mail she always left for the tenants on the big table in the vestibule.

"Mr. Kirby?" she said. "He's sick."

I took the mail she handed me. There wasn't much—just a bill for a new dance costume. It's sure highway robbery what they charge for a handful of sequins and a quarter of a yard of black net.

"He's a queer fish," I said.

"As long as he pays the rent on time, there's nothing I can do about getting him to move," Mrs. Keefer said. It was the first hint I'd had that she didn't like him, either. "All I hope," she went on, "is that he doesn't take it into his head to die up there."

"He's that sick?"

"Well, I knocked on the door yesterday to give him his mail. I didn't stay long enough to take a good look, but I could see he was in bed and he looked terrible."

The coughing started a couple of days later. It was raw and sore-sounding, and it could have been coming from my own room instead of upstairs. One afternoon it even woke me up. I hadn't come in until almost five the morning before, and I was dead-beat. Half in and half out of sleep, I could have sworn he was beside me, coughing. What a feeling that was, feeling *he* was lying beside me!

That woke me all the way! I sat up in bed, listening. If I was sick, I thought, would Mrs. Keefer or anybody else care one way or the other, or bother to do anything about it?

Less than a half-hour later, I had been to the super-market on the corner and I was back, knocking at his door.

When he stopped coughing I heard him say, "Who is it?"

"Lily Frye," I said. Then, because I knew he wouldn't recognize the name from a hole in the wall, I added, "I live downstairs."

He said, "Come in."

It was a big attic room, and the blind was pulled across the skylight. My foot kicked against something, and it started to roll across the floor. It was a head . . . a small painted doll's head!

Mrs. Keefer was right. He looked terrible. He sat up and leaned on his elbow. Right there was when I should have run—turned and run down the stairs and into my room and locked the door after me. I know it now. I even think I knew it then. But I had that awful feeling you get in a dream sometimes, of

being up to your knees in molasses and going deeper all the time. And I couldn't move to save my life.

" What do you want? " he asked.

That did it. That started the whole business. " Mrs. Keefer told me you were sick," I said, swallowing hard. " I thought maybe you could use something to eat."

He looked suspicious for a minute; then he fell back on the pillow and closed his eyes. " Thank you," he said. " You're very kind."

Suddenly I wasn't afraid of him any more. I wondered why I had ever been afraid of him. I rolled back the shade and let in the sun. The place was a mess, full of dust and rags and glass jars with paintbrushes stuck in them. Everywhere I looked there were dolls' heads, all pink and painted with big blue eyes and smiling red mouths.

" That's how I make a living," he said, watching me. " I give them faces and send them back to the factory for bodies."

" No kidding? " I said, picking up one of them and turning it over in my hands. I don't know what made me tell him, but I said, " I never had a doll."

I made him soup, some boiled eggs, toast, and tea. While he was eating, I tried to clean up the place. " You're the first artist I've ever met," I said, picking up several big tubes of paint off the floor and laying them side by side on the shelf.

" I'm not an artist. I paint faces on dolls."

" Well? "

" Well, that's not art."

" It's better than I could do. I can't even draw a straight line."

Why that should have struck him as being funny I don't know, but he smiled, or maybe he was just feeling better after eating. I don't remember what we talked about that first day. It was just that he made talking so easy.

During the next week I fell into the habit of shopping for him and cooking dinner for him. After the first couple of days I even started having my own dinner with him. He'd sit up in bed with a tray across his knees, and I'd push the kitchen table close so we could talk. I think I was happier than I had ever been in my whole life, and that's no lie.

There was a way he had of getting words out of me that I didn't guess were in me. And he really seemed interested in listening to everything I said. Nobody else that I could remember was ever interested at all. I got-to-thinking that he wouldn't be bad-looking without the beard.

I asked him about it once.

" Do you *want* to look like a character? " I said.

He rubbed the left side of his face. " I've got a scar, Lily," he said. " This covers it." It was his business. I let it drop.

Then one afternoon I went upstairs and knocked, but there wasn't any answer. I knew right away he was better and had gone out. Well, I thought, that's the end of that.

But it wasn't. That night I came out on the floor of the club to do my dance, and there he was, sitting at a table. I can't explain why, but for the first time, I was a little ashamed of the number. I used to think it was great stuff, because the customers got a kick out of it. But that night, with him watching—I don't know, but it seemed cheap. Afterwards I went over to him.

" Well," I said, " what did you think? "

" You were lovely," he said.

" Yeah? " I felt better, so I sat down.

" I've brought you a present." He opened a big box and took out a doll.

I caught my breath. She had the softest gold hair and she was wearing a little black velvet coat that had a real fur collar. But the face! the doll's face!

" It's you," he said.

" Go on. I'm not half as pretty as you've made her! " All the same, I was plenty flattered.

Mrs. Keefer used to see us together a lot after that, going out for walks on Sunday mornings, for instance, and once she got me alone in the hall and said, " I'd be more careful how I pick my friends, Miss Frye."

I didn't figure it was any of her lookout, so I said, " I don't think you've got any right to pick them for me, Mrs. Keefer. Besides, Mr. Kirby's a real gentleman."

I suppose, to be perfectly honest, the main reason I stuck up for him was that I felt bad about being afraid of him in the beginning, and calling him " The Beard " and " The Geek " in front of her.

Only a couple of weeks after that, I found out about the jinx. It was after one of those Sunday-morning walks. He had taken his block and pencil along so he could sketch, and afterwards we came back to his place, where I made coffee. Just for fun I said, " Say—how would you like to do my picture? "

I finished carrying the cups over to the table, filling the sugar bowl, and pouring milk into the jug before I realized he hadn't answered. " I mean it," I said. " I'd sit so still you wouldn't even know I was breathing."

" I've already painted you," he said, not looking at me, " on the doll."

" No—I mean a real picture. I'd get a fancy frame for it and

hang it up in my room." That time I noticed how long it took before he answered, and right away I was sorry I mentioned it. "That must have sounded plenty conceited," I said quickly. "Who do I think I am? Mona Lisa or somebody?"

I happened to know about Mona Lisa, because there used to be this bubble dancer I knew. She'd do her whole routine with a balloon and a funny smile that looked as if it was pasted on her, and she changed her name from Beatrice Wolosky to Mona Lisa. She told me it was a well-known masterpiece.

"Forget it," I said. "Coffee's ready."

"Lily," he said, "I can't do your portrait, or anybody's, ever, because I'm a jinx."

"What do you mean . . . jinx?"

"I as much as murdered the last girl who posed for me."

I must have knocked over the jug I was reaching for, and the milk started dribbling down the side of the tablecloth. "I . . . I'll wipe it up," I said, only I didn't. I just sat there.

He told me how it happened. Painting portraits was what he used to do. He had studied all over, in Europe even, and people were beginning to talk about him, and then there was the night he did his last one and never any more after that. It was three years ago when it was finished and the model left. He stood in front of the easel pretty satisfied, I guess; then all of a sudden it seemed to jump out at him.

Over what he had painted was another face! It wasn't so easy to see at first, but once you found it, it was plenty clear. A death's head!

He hadn't meant to put it there, but it was there just the same. Where the girl's arm bent was the top of the thing, and the curve in her hand made one of the big hollows for the eye sockets, and where her dress folded he could see the skull-jaw.

He ran down the stairs after the girl like a crazy one. He had to find her, he said, because Death had been standing beside him, painting over his shoulder, and already had a head start.

"I hadn't meant to tell you any of this, Lily," he said, and he sounded awfully tired.

"What happened to the girl?"

"She used to take a short cut home through an alley. That's where I found her."

The way the police figured it, she had been coshed. On the ground was her handbag with her money gone. She must have tried to fight off her attacker, so he picked up something heavy and bashed her head in with it. It was a pretty rotten story and nothing much for a Sunday afternoon.

I told him so. Then I said, " What's all this got to do with you not doing any more portraits? "

" Don't you understand, Lily? " he said. " I marked that girl."

" It was a freak. You didn't put the death's head in the painting on purpose."

" But something in me put it there, and marked her for death. How do I know it wouldn't happen again? "

Very few things I know taste as bad as cold coffee; all the same, I finished mine. " Nuts," I said, " it wouldn't happen to me."

" We won't talk about it any more," he said.

Well, we didn't, that day; but after that I kept pestering him. The whole thing struck me as being crazy! Here was an artist everybody used to say had a big future, and what does he do? Tosses it over because he gets it into his head he's a jinx! I knew I could prove how screwy it was if I could just get him to let me pose for him.

" No," he said. " I won't take the chance, Lily."

I got so mad my hands started to get red. That's a peculiar thing that happens to me, whenever I get mad or nervous.

" You know what I think? " I said. " I think you're an idiot. Every once in a while a person gets born and God gives him an extra little pat for luck and He says, ' That's so you can grow up and do something special . . . like being able to sing really well or dance or paint pictures! ' " I was wound up and really mad.

" Lily—" he said, but I kept right on going.

" There's nothing special in the kind of dance routines I do, but if God had picked me out for that extra little pat I'd be so proud I wouldn't let any cock-eyed superstition about a jinx throw *me*."

He came over and took my hands. They were burning like fire, and I should have been holding castanets, the way they were shaking. He kissed them right in the middle of each palm, and then he closed the fingers over, to hold the kiss in. Nobody had ever done a thing like that to me before.

A few days later we started the painting.

Sitting still for a long time, not even moving your head, isn't easy. You get an itch and you're afraid to scratch it, because you might change your position, and then your neck starts to feel stiff, or your leg. I bet I knew by heart every inch of the wall I was facing.

To be perfectly honest, I was always glad when he'd say, " Take a break, Lily. That's enough for today."

It wasn't only that I was glad to be able to move again; it

was because then he'd come back from wherever he had been. I can't explain it exactly, but when he painted he'd get that inside-himself look I used to catch when I passed him on the stairs. It didn't take much to remember how I used to move a little closer to the banister and turn my head the other way. After a while I began to wish the darn thing were done.

Mrs. Keefer came into my room without being invited one night. "You spend a lot of time upstairs, don't you?" she said.

I'm the kind who doesn't like to fight. Arguments just seem to upset my stomach, but I said, laying on the sarcasm pretty thick, "I suppose you've been listening at the door. Well, I hate to disappoint you, Mrs. Keefer, but the reason you hear us being so quiet is because I'm having my portrait painted, and Mr. Kirby doesn't happen to like conversation while he's working."

"Listen, dearie," she said, "you don't want to take chances, do you? He's not all there, that man."

"Are you saying he's crazy?"

"I'm saying *you* are, if you let him finish that thing. Now, you're a smart girl. You can think up a good excuse to get out of it."

"How do you know I want to get out of it, Mrs. Keefer?" I said.

"Maybe I ought to tell you what happened to the last model he had."

"I know all about that. He had nothing to do with her getting killed."

"The police never found the one who did it," she said, "but I've got my own opinions." She came up very close. I could feel her breath on my face. I wondered how to shut her up and get her out. "He put the stamp of death on her," she said.

So she knows about that too, I thought.

The next thing she said knocked me sideways.

"I knew nothing good would come of those two, always screaming and tearing at each other. They were like wild animals. Once I had to go up there because the other tenants were complaining. I was in time to see her rip the side of his face with her nails before she ran down the stairs. But she came back. She always came back."

Something happened to my knees then, and I had to sit down on the edge of the bed. He had never told me that girl was anything more than just another model to him, and now I knew where he got the scar . . . the scar he kept covered with the beard. I felt sick.

"You get out of here," I told her. "I don't want to listen to any more of your stories."

"They made quite a thing about it in the Sunday papers," she said before she left. "Jinx artist, they called him. I've got it all in a scrapbook, if you're interested."

A person gets a lot of time to think, just sitting without moving. After that talk with Mrs. Keefer, I got to thinking more and more about that poor girl who was murdered. I used to think about her so much that pretty soon I got the feeling I *was* her, and that everything that was happening was happening all over again.

No matter how many times I asked, he never let me see the painting, and one day I just couldn't stand it any more. I had to see it, and I wasn't sure why.

"You'll see it when it's finished," he said. "I don't like to show unfinished work."

But before he had a chance to stop me, I got down off the platform, went over, and planted myself in front of the easel. "All right," he said, not even sounding riled about it. "If you're that curious, take a good look."

What I saw was a half-finished painting of a girl who was beginning to look a little like me. Nothing else . . . But I couldn't take my eyes off the canvas. All of a sudden I knew what it was I was looking for: I was looking for a death's head, I was trying to find that other face!

"Lily!" It wasn't that he said my name so loud, but it was as if he had put two fingers in his mouth and whistled right into my eardrum. I thought my head was coming off.

"Lily, you're not afraid of me, are you?"

That's when I realized I was backing away from him. He reached out to grab my hands, and I fell! There was a packing-case behind me, and I stumbled backwards and lost my balance. Down there on the floor, I could see his long legs standing over me; and I couldn't have got up again then if I had wanted to. I kept moving along on the floor, whimpering, until I got to the wall. Then I leaned my head against it, closed my eyes, and waited for something to happen. I don't know what I expected to happen, but I waited.

The slashing of the knife, when it ripped into the canvas, seemed to tear the room in half. At first I didn't know what the sound meant; when I looked up and saw what he was doing, I felt sick. He kept swinging his arm up and down, hacking at it.

His work! All his hard work! He was tearing it into ribbons, and he was crying—not making any noise, but crying just the same! The next thing I knew, I was yelling for him to stop. My arm was on his arm, going up and down with his. I knew it was too late then, whether he stopped or not; but I kept hanging on.

Finally he dropped the palette-knife on the floor, and he was holding me and kissing me and we were both crying.

"I'm sorry," I kept saying. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

"I shouldn't have started it, Lily. It's no good."

"We'll do it over again. This time it'll be all right."

"No."

"Please," I said. "Please, or I won't ever forgive myself."

He took my face into his big hands; then he lowered his heavy head and kissed me again. "Don't be afraid of me, Lily," he said.

Later on, before I went down to my room, I said, "Tomorrow we'll start over again, won't we?"

I thought he was going to say no; then he smiled, kind of funny. "Yes," he said, very slow, as if he was thinking of something else. "Tomorrow we'll start over again."

The next time it was all different. He twisted the chair round so I had another wall to start examining. He moved the easel to a new position and even stood a big mirror behind me on the platform, because, as he said, he wanted to get a reflection of my hair. One thing I know I've got is very pretty hair. Usually I tie it back or pin it on the top of my head, but he made me let it fall loose over my shoulders, so he could see the back of it in the mirror. I promised him this time I wouldn't even ask to look at the painting until he was through.

Only one thing wasn't any different . . . that inside-himself look he'd get when he worked. He didn't smile or talk, and most of the time he kept his head a little to one side, as if he was listening to somebody invisible standing beside him. He'd even move his lips without making a sound, as if answering that somebody I couldn't see.

Mrs. Keefer got into the habit of leaving her door open on the first floor whenever I came home. She'd just sit there in her big blue upholstered chair, watching me go up the stairs. A thing like that can make a person nervous, and lately I hadn't been feeling too hot anyway. It was those headaches I was having . . . a tight hurt over my eyes as if my head was beginning to shrink.

One day I started up the stairs; then I decided to turn round and go back. There were a lot of things I wanted to tell that old witch—such as once and for all to mind her own business.

She stood up as soon as I came in, closed the door, and started to whisper. "I knew you'd come for it sooner or later," she said. "You'll change your mind after you've read it. You're a good girl, and I wouldn't want anything bad to happen to you."

She lifted the cushion on the big chair, took out a scrapbook,

and gave it to me. "The first part's all personal," she said. "Pictures of when I was married—things like that. I put a marker in the pages that *you* want to see. Take it upstairs with you. Read it carefully."

I didn't look at it for two days. I didn't want to look at it. Then, early one morning, just as the city was getting light, I pulled a chair up to the window and I opened the scrapbook. What used to be an orchid, probably from Mrs. Keefer's wedding bouquet, fell into my lap. If there's anything I hate, it's dead flowers.

Having most of the story take place right there in the house she owned was probably the biggest thing that ever happened to her, so she had saved all the newspaper cuttings. The longest bit was from the coloured section that usually comes right after the Sunday comics. They like to fill it full of murder and sex, and this one laid it on with a trowel!

They used the title, DEATH STOOD BESIDE HIM; and the illustration that went with it showed a beautiful girl with a lot of leg, posing for an artist who was supposed to be 'him.' And next to him, holding another paintbrush, was Death, dressed in a long black hooded cloak. The first thing that came to my mind was how he always seemed to be listening, when he worked, to somebody or something I couldn't see. I felt cold all over, and pulled the bathrobe close around me.

It was pretty much the story I had got from him and Mrs. Keefer, but it went into more detail about how much in love he had been with the girl.

> *After she was brutally murdered, Kirby went half insane with grief and a sense of guilt-ridden remorse. If it is true, as has been said, that each man kills the thing he loves, perhaps, in some macabre way, without his knowing it, he had been a partner with Death.*

All of it was written like that for cheap thrills; but it shook me, I've got to admit. Somewhere in the story, it gave the name of the man who had bought the portrait afterwards—a Mr. Harrison Phelps, who lived on Park Avenue.

The sun was really up by the time I put the scrapbook away. That afternoon when I went up to pose, I got a terrific shock. The beard was gone. "You told me it made me look like a character, Lily," he said, "so I shaved it off."

He seemed about ten years younger and much better-looking, except that the scar stood out. Because he had done it to please me, I tried to act pleased, but it was like being with a stranger. Sitting up there on the platform, I kept thinking that without the beard he must look exactly the way he did a long time ago, when

that other girl sat and posed for him. She used to sit where I was sitting, and I began to get that feeling I had once before—that everything that was happening was happening all over again.

"I've got a headache," I said. "I don't want to pose any more today." It was the truth. My head was splitting. I don't know what made me say, "Why didn't you ever tell me you were in love with that girl?"

It was the strangest thing how that white scar turned almost purplish. "Who told you?" he asked.

"Mrs. Keefer." I couldn't bring myself to mention the scrapbook.

"Is that what's been upsetting you, Lily?" he asked. Then he said, "I didn't love her. I hated her! I hated her so much that maybe without realizing it I wished her dead. I've never really loved anyone except you, Lily."

He was saying it to make me feel better, but I kept remembering how the story in the scrapbook had said something about "each man kills the thing he loves." I wanted to get out of there, so I could breathe. He came over to help me when he saw me start to get down from the platform. That was the first time it happened.

I seemed to be standing two feet behind myself, watching—just standing there and watching him lift that other girl, who was me too; putting big hands on her and lifting her down to the floor. I wanted to yell out loud, warn her to be careful—and then it was *really* me he was holding.

His face was very close to mine, and his eyes were so dark a person could get lost in them, or drowned in them. I tried to make my voice sound natural, and I told him I had to be at work early.

"All right," he said, and he let me go. Just like that he let me go, but still I didn't take a deep breath until I got all the way down the street.

I missed the first show at the club that night. Instead, I looked up Harrison Phelps's number in the telephone book and called him. I didn't tell him much over the phone, except that I had read about him buying the painting, and that I had a special reason for wanting to see it. He was really very nice about it, considering he didn't know me or anything, and told me to come over.

His apartment on Park Avenue had a living-room the size of an indoor skating-rink. Mrs. Phelps was middle-aged and smelt expensive, and I didn't miss the look she threw her husband when I told them that the same artist was doing my portrait.

"How well do you know this Kirby?" he asked.

That was a leading question, so I just said, " He lives in the same house as I do. Have you still the portrait, Mr. Phelps? "

He took me into a library, I guess it was, and I saw it hanging on the wall over the fireplace. There was a fire going, and the flames lit up the girl in the picture so that she seemed alive, almost. For a minute I couldn't find what I was looking for, but all of a sudden it jumped out at me. Where her arm bent was the top of the " thing," and the curve in her hand made one of the big hollows for the eye sockets, and where her dress folded, I could see the jaw of the death's head!

" Are you all right, Miss Frye? "

" Tell me—" I said, " you know all about paintings—do you figure a thing like that could have been done by accident? "

" You want my honest opinion? "

" Yes."

" I don't see how it could have been. It's much too carefully designed."

That was yesterday. Today I quit my job and went to see Lou. I told him I had to get out of New York City.

It was six o'clock by the time Lily reached the brownstone house in the West Seventies. There were neat little stacks of letters left for the tenants on the table in the vestibule, but she didn't bother to find out whether there was anything for her. All she wanted to do was pack and get to Grand Central Station as soon as possible.

" Miss Frye! "

Lily froze, halfway up the stairs.

" Did you read what I gave you, Miss Frye? " Mrs. Keefer asked. Her voice was the soft hiss of air escaping from a punctured tire.

" No," Lily lied, without turning or looking at her. She ran up the rest of the steps. How funny it is, she thought. How funny it is how they come up to meet my shoes. I wonder why I never noticed that before.

She had trouble with the key to her door, because her hands were fire-red and trembling. She started to cry. " My hands," she said out loud. " My darn old hands. Why do they always have to do that whenever I'm nervous? "

Somehow, she managed to unlock the door, and for the next fifteen minutes she frantically stuffed costumes into a suitcase, stopping only now and then to notice how pretty they were, and how the light sparkled on the sequins.

The doll with the little black velvet coat and the real fur collar was smiling on the dresser. It was the first doll she had ever had.

And sometimes she'd talk to it as if it understood. Now she knew it couldn't understand, because it wasn't alive. It was only a dead thing, all dressed up, with Lily's face painted on it.

With a little cry of horror, she picked it up, flung it into an open drawer, and banged the drawer shut. Then she went on with her frantic packing, but she couldn't forget that in the lightless, airless drawer was a dead doll who looked just like her.

He knocked at the door, very softly.

She knew who it was, but she asked anyway, "Who is it?" The knob turned first, and then the door opened. Of course, she thought, the door couldn't very well open first, before the knob turned, could it?

"Why are you packing, Lily?" he asked.

"I saw my agent today," she heard herself say. "He has a booking for me out of town."

"Oh? When do you open?"

"A week on Monday," she told him; then she bit her lip, but it was too late to get the words back.

"Then you don't have to leave tonight, do you?" he said.

She shook her head.

"That's good," he said. "The portrait will be done tonight, and I want you to see it. Will you stay?"

She said yes very softly, because she was too terrified to scream no at him. Once again she experienced the sensation of standing two feet behind herself, watching. It was sad—so very sad she felt like weeping.

She saw the man who lived upstairs put his big hand on Lily's arm and lead her out of the room, and she thought: That poor girl, who's going to help her now?

In his studio, he made her sit on the platform for the last time. "I could finish without you," he said. "I haven't really needed you all along, but it kept you away from the easel. I had a reason for not wanting you to see this until it's done."

There was no sound in the room except the sound of a clock ticking. How strange she had never heard it before. Each beat was slow and heavy and almost seemed to come from inside her. It took her time to realize there was no clock . . . only the beating of her own heart.

After a long time, he put down the brush.

"Come here," he said. Then he yelled, "Lily," and swooped down at her.

She wondered what he had done with the black hooded cloak he had been wearing a moment before. She could have sworn he had been wearing a black hooded cloak.

His nails dug into her arm, and he swept her across the room.

She looked back dazedly, in time to see the big mirror that had been standing behind her sway back and forth for a moment, before it smashed into a waterfall of hundreds of pieces of glass.

"You could have been killed," he said, breathing heavily. "You knocked against it when you stood up."

"Such a big mirror," she said. "I'll bet it's about a million years of bad luck to break that."

"Not for you," he said. "Look at the painting."

"No!" Defying him set her free, and she added, "No," a second time. She knew she would find two faces burnt into that canvas.

"Lily," he said, "I want you to look at it. Don't be afraid."

She raised her face to him, frowning. He was saying something, but it was like a film with the sound cut off, and she couldn't hear a word. She lowered her head.

The whole floor was alive with fragments of mirror. If she could find a way to thread them with a needle she knew she could make the most dazzlingly brilliant costume out of them.

"Mother," she whispered, "I'm scared." Then she thought it was so corny, really, to call on a mother she didn't even remember that she started to laugh. She was laughing when he took her in his arms.

"Stop it," he said. He buried his face against the pulse in her throat and repeated, "Stop it."

On the ledge of the easel she saw a small sharp knife he used in his painting. Then, once more, Lily stood apart and watched the girl who looked like her, but wasn't really, reach out, curl her fingers round the knife, and lift it as high as she could over his back.

That's it, she thought. You're a good girl, and I wouldn't want anything bad to happen to you. Or was that what Mrs. Keefer had said to her a long time ago? Never mind; it wasn't important. Nothing was important, except to save herself.

"Do it," she whispered. "Don't be afraid, Lily."

The knife went into him almost soundlessly. She kept her hand on the handle until she felt something sticky spread over it. Then she let go.

He looked surprised . . . He sagged heavily on top of her before he fell. She didn't feel anything, except safe.

"Lily," he managed to bring out, "didn't I tell you it would be a jinx?"

Only the wrong person's been killed, she thought, and she went over and looked at the painting.

They found her there, much later, sitting in front of the easel,

holding his head in her lap and rocking him back and forth as if he were a child. They found her singing to him very softly and sweetly.

On the floor around her they found the broken pieces of a mirror, and on the easel was a self-portrait of the artist.

★ ★ ★

DUCAL BROLLIES

The previous duke was the man who had built several miles of tunnels so that he never need be seen leaving or entering his house; who had turned the indoor riding-school at Welbeck into a skating-rink for his staff—all the maids had been given silver skates, and if he found a frightened young girl in his path, scrubbing some marble staircase, he would say: "Haven't you skated today? Then run along at once!"—who had had letter-boxes built into many of the living-room doors, and water-closets with leather-upholstered seats installed in their corners; whose handkerchiefs were embroidered with the days of the week to ensure a correct rotation; and who insisted that his workmen should ride to and from work on donkeys, carrying umbrellas he had given them.

SHEILA WINGFIELD,
Real People

★ ★ ★

ANSWERS to MIXED GRILL

on page 26

1. *Popular tradition has it that shipping clerks, allotting cabins on the cooler side of the ship to V.I.P.'s travelling to and from the East, wrote them down as: Port Out, Starboard Home*
2. *a. Netherlands b. Malaya c. South Africa d. Turkey e. India, Persia*
3. *Napoleon (Josephine was the widow of the Vicomte de Beauharnais)*
4. *a. What animal walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, three in the evening?*
   b. Œdipus
   c. Man (Infant crawls on all fours, man walks upright, old man needs a stick)
5. *a. Colonel b. Group Captain*
6. *a. Birds' eggs*
   b. Classification of diseases
   c. Trees

Spanish Dancer

Flurry of dark curtain, crash of cymbals—and she was there

by BRIAN CLEEVE

I THINK it was the accordion made the old man sign him on. We were lying in Hull, unloading a pile of junk from Hamburg, when he came down the quayside looking for a job as galley-boy, small and thin and dark, in a shabby mackintosh, with a cardboard attaché case clutched in both hands and an old, battered accordion slung over his shoulder.

He looked about as much like a sailor as I look like a fan-dancer, with his girl's face and his small, delicate hands, and the cook threatened to poison the old man's tea if he so much as let the boy set foot on the gangway. But all the same the old man signed him on. Galley-boys were hard to get was the reason he gave the cook, but I still think it was the accordion.

His name was Sim, and he came from some dark, sodden little town in the north, where they make machinery and all the windows have lace curtains that are washed on Fridays and get grey-black again by Monday night.

He'd been brought up in an orphanage there, and when he was old enough he'd been put to work in a factory and had stood all day pushing buttons and pulling levers, until the noise drove him mad and he'd run away to Hull and us, standing on the quayside with the rain like silver frost on his dark hair and his thin, sallow cheeks and his leaking mackintosh.

But maybe it wasn't only the noise. Maybe it was something in the blood that drove him, because he told us once that he thought his parents had been gipsies, and you could believe it when you looked at him, especially if he was playing the accordion, his eyes dark and seeing nothing but the music, his hands quick as the wind ruffling the grass. He came alive then, the galley and the greasy dishes and the seasickness and the cook's jeering banished out of his mind.

We were heading south, to fetch wine and cork from Lisbon and Setubal, and after the Bay it was calm. So calm that even our old pig remembered her manners and stayed quiet, just rustling through the evening water, and when the last of the dishes were washed, or broken, Sim would come out on the little

after deck and hitch himself onto a bollard, cradling that old, shabby accordion in his hands as if it was a woman's face and he was reading love there and kindness. And we'd come and sit on the iron deck at his feet, and keep very quiet, because when the day was finished and the evening started, he was king.

Even the old man listened, standing in the door of the wheelhouse, smoking his pipe, and growling over his shoulder sometimes at the helmsman, his pipe-stem making little stabs in the air as if he was trying to beat time to the music.

It was strange music that he played to us. Nothing we ever knew. Sometimes we would ask him for a tune we'd heard on shore, but he'd only shake his head and smile, and go on playing. One time it would be grey, crying music like the north he came from, with the wind whining in the slag-heaps and the beggar women hungry; another time he'd look across the warm, dark satin of the sea with the sun going down like a scarlet emperor into his huge bed, and his face would light up and his fingers dance on the keys as if they'd gone mad, and the old man would come to the bridge rail and lean over in the shadow of the wheelhouse, his pipe like a cinder burning against the fading sky, and our feet would be itching under us to dance.

A Spanish kind of music it would be, with the oranges burning on the dark green trees, and white roads, and dust, and men sleeping in the sunlight. Although I don't know how he knew such music. The bosun said that it wasn't real music at all, that he just made it up. But it was good to listen to, all the same. Even the cook forgave him when he played like that.

We reached Lisbon after midnight, when Sim was already asleep, and when he came on deck the next morning at six o'clock the sight of it struck him like a blind man seeing for the first time; the white houses on the hillsides, the scent of flowers waking, and the sun lifting out of Spain in its morning bravery. I was with him and he walked across the deck with his hands held out to the land and his face shining. If the rail hadn't stopped him I think he'd have walked smack over the side into the Tagus.

It was as if he was hypnotized. Even his face changed. The sallowness seemed to go out of it and he looked brown, like the Portuguese men slouching along the dock to work. I half expected him to talk to them in their own lingo. It was as if he had come home.

But the cook came on deck then and kicked him into the galley to start on breakfasts, and we slung platforms over the side away from the dock wall and started going through the motions of chipping her down and red-leading her, although it would have

been a kindness to all concerned if the old man had just let her rust through and sink.

But we didn't do very much. We took it in turns for one of us to bash away with a chipping-hammer so that the old man would think we were working, and the rest of us lay along the platforms, smoking, and spitting into the river, and waiting for the evening.

It was a month since any of us had been south, and we wanted to get the taste of Hull and the North Sea and the English Channel out of our throats. Sixpence a bottle for red wine, if you know where to go, and threepence for grappa. And a floor show thrown in.

By a quarter to five even the old man gave up trying to make us work, and we went below to wash and change into shore clothes. Some of them didn't wait for tea, although it was fried fish and chips, and I might not have waited myself if Sim hadn't asked me to.

He leaned out of the galley as I was going past and caught my sleeve. "Lofty," he whispered, "will you wait for me? I want you to show me some place where there's music. I won't be long finishing the dishes and cleaning up."

So I waited, leaning against the rail and smoking, watching the lights come on until they covered the hills like a woman's shawl all studded with sequins, winking in candlelight. The sky is black over Portugal at night, and the stars are round and burning, as close as the town lights burning on the hillsides—or else the town lights are as far away. And the gardens of the rich houses are full of magnolia and bougainvillaea, big white and purple flowers that empty their scent like wine jars on the air.

Sim came up from the foc'sle, and we went down the gang-plank together, not saying anything; me because I was remembering when I was as young as Sim, and Sim because he couldn't speak, I think.

The orphanage, the factory where they made bicycles, the wet, grimy streets, and the lace curtains black and limp with soot, the grey skies like dirty blotting-paper—all that was a bad dream, and he was coming home, all the gipsy waking in his blood.

He walked differently, not shuffling any more like they do in the north, from wearing clogs, but with a small spring in his step. I offered him a cigarette and he just shook his head, his lips tight together and his eyes half closed, breathing in the scent from the gardens farther up the river.

If he wanted music, it wasn't any good taking Sim to the place I'd been going to, so I turned the other way out of the main drag and up the hillside towards a small place that I'd been to a couple of years before, where the floor show wasn't quite as

businesslike as the one I'd had in mind, and the wine was a bit more expensive.

There's a shop in front of it, where they sell garlic and dried fish and polony and wine, and the woman behind the counter is so fat that she gets breathless when she rings up the till, her chins rippling down into her bosom and her belly, and her ear-rings shaking like chandeliers when she laughs. Just beside where she sits there's a beaded curtain over a doorway, and the cabaret is through there; a long, low-ceilinged room, full of tobacco smoke and the smell of wine and garlic. More Spaniards come there than Portuguese, because the fat woman who owns it is Spanish, and she has her cook make the polony and the pilaff and the olla podrida the way they like it, and she usually has Spanish girls for the floor show. The few Portuguese customers come because they think that, being Spanish, it must be sinful and exciting, and they like that, being a rather sombre people themselves.

We found a table close to the dance floor and I ordered red wine and told myself that it was worth the extra money just to watch Sim's face. And then the girl came on.

A quick crescendo on the drums, the flurry of a dark curtain at the far end of the room, a crash on the cymbals, and she was there, statue-still in the middle of the dance floor, white face and hands like new ivory, black lace mantilla, and one arm curved above her head with its high, golden comb, the castanets waiting for her fingers to begin.

I saw Sim stiffen, leaning forward almost as if he was going to reach out and touch her, and I could have sworn that for an instant she looked at him. But in the same instant the drums rolled, her fingers gathered the black castanets until they crackled like burning thorns, and her arms and body melted into liquid dancing, like water running over rocks, black mantilla curved behind her white face and shoulders, black skirt swirling over bone-white feet. And the men playing dice and eating sausage stopped to watch her, and Sim spilt his wine in a great scarlet stain across the tabletop, bright as blood.

Two minutes she danced, maybe three, and no one whispered. Only the shadows moved as the candle flames wavered in their wax-caked bottles. Only the shadows and the Spanish dancer, quiet as a shadow on her bare white feet, not belonging to the castanets or the drums or the guitars. The castanets seemed to surround her, quite separate from her, circling her dancing body with their brittle halo of sound. And then she was gone.

Drumbeat in diminuendo, whispering into stillness, one last liquid movement of her hands, flurry of dark curtain, and then nothing. Only a tall, gaunt man standing by the curtain that had

closed on her, bowing for her in answer to the applause, his eyes hidden by the brim of his hat, and his face unsmiling.

I shook Sim by the arm to bring his mind back to the table, and poured more wine for him. "There'll be music next," I said, and he looked at me as if I was talking a foreign language.

"Who is she, Lofty?" he whispered, as if he expected me to tell him, and when I laughed he leaned over to the nearest table and tried to ask one of the men there.

"Shut up," I said, because it's even easier to get into trouble in Lisbon than it is in Hull. But I knew that whatever I did, there was going to be trouble.

He sat as if he was blind and deaf until she came on again, and then he came half out of his chair as if he was going to dance with her.

This time I know she saw him, and for a long second they looked at one another, until she swept her lashes down on her cheek and slid away, her dark skirt swinging as she moved.

She was young for a place like that, too young and too good a dancer. Maybe nineteen, and she danced as if her blood was burning. And all the time she was dancing, the tall, gaunt, elderly man who had bowed for her stood by the curtain and watched her, his body held stiff and tense, his arms folded, the dark brim of his Spanish hat hiding his eyes.

He must have seen Sim lifting out of his chair, his hands half held out to the girl, and I was afraid that he'd seen her instant of hesitation, the moment when she looked at him, poising between two movements of her dance. I thought that it was time to go and I wished I'd brought my cosh, but nothing could have got Sim away from that table while there was a chance of her coming back to dance again.

We stayed there till four in the morning and I'd had so much wine by then that I didn't care what happened. I remember kissing the fat woman at the counter and someone hitting me on the back of the neck with a kilo of polony, and a chair getting smashed over somebody's skull, and then Sim was dragging me down the hillside with police whistles blowing scarlet threads in the darkness and a bird singing in my head.

[redacted] until the old man washed me out of it with a [redacted]d then I lay on the platform over the side, [redacted]r tied to my foot. I'd wag my foot and the [redacted]inst the ship's plates, and for all I know, [redacted]ed some rust off, and meanwhile I slept, [redacted]dreams.

[redacted]in Lisbon I wanted to go to that night

was the cabaret up the hill, particularly as I wasn't too sure what had happened there before we left, but Sim was waiting for me as I went past the galley on my way ashore.

" Come with me," he begged, and I suppose I must be weak, or maybe I felt responsible for him, because I went.

" We can't go back to that place," I said. " The minute we show up they'll send for the police."

" Of course they won't," he said, as if already he knew Lisbon and Portugal like his own hands. " You didn't do anything, just kissed the old woman. It was somebody else did the fighting."

I felt the back of my neck where it was still bruised from the polony, and wasn't sure whether I believed him, but I let myself be convinced, and an hour later we were walking up the hill in the velvet darkness, magnolias spilling over old, broken walls, the houses faced with tiles, and a cool wind blowing down the steep cobbled street.

The old woman winked at me when we went in, one huge cheek quivering with the effort, and pursed up her enormous lips as if she was waiting for me to kiss her again.

" Più tarde," I said, shuddering, " après vino, eh? " And she laughed until her whole body shook like a gigantic jelly and her glass ear-rings clashed their drops together.

The girl was dancing as we came in, a white flower between her teeth and two more in her hair, and when we sat down at the same table, beside the dance floor, she swept close to us like the sea's edge running swift across the sand and back again, her body twisting, the castanets burning their thorn music in her hands, faster than her feet. In and away as if she was teasing us, as if she was teasing Sim, her eyes dark and full of a sudden laughter as she looked at him, and then the lashes down and covering them, her face demure and white as ivory.

Again she came, her body bending sideways, one arm curving backwards above her head, and with a swift movement of her hand she threw the flower she had been holding in her teeth onto the table between us.

Sim closed his hand on it as if he knew instinctively that it should be hidden, but quick as he was, the gaunt man by the far curtain had seen it fall, and his hand slid under his coat in a gesture that I'd seen before when knives were coming. I wouldn't have cared to be that girl when he got her out of sight, and I wasn't sure that I'd care to be Sim.

But it was past talking now. There were only two peopl
the room as far as Sim and the girl were concerned. On
people in the world. Maybe you don't believe that that
That love could come so swiftly? But maybe you ha

red wine in a cabaret in Lisbon when you were young, or been a Spanish dancer with a gaunt, elderly protector who lets no man speak to you, and all of summer burning in your blood?

Sim held the white flower in his closed hand and watched her, and she watched him, over her shoulder as she swept on her bone-white feet across the floor, out of her huge, dark eyes as she bent backwards, arms outspread in her final movement, over her shoulder again as she vanished through the curtain at the room's end, the gaunt man drawing aside for her, one hand still under his dark, threadbare coat.

He must have beaten her outside, because when she came back there was a dull red bruise on one of her white shoulders and she didn't look at Sim. She didn't dance well either, moving slowly and listlessly as if something inside her had been broken, and the men in the cabaret got bored, and shuffled their feet, and began playing dice again. And after that she didn't come back, although we waited until the cabaret was empty, and outside the sky was pale above the hill.

It was all I could do to get Sim back to the ship. Every couple of yards he'd try and break away from me and go back up the hill to find her. "Maybe he's killed her," he'd say, his face white with a kind of sick terror. "Let me go, Lofty, let me go to her." And then I'd get a new hold on him and drag him another couple of yards. It was like trying to hold a cat.

We got back to the ship just before six in the morning, in time to turn to, and I felt like death all day. We were to sail at midnight for Setubal, forty miles to the south, and I swore that nothing in Portugal was going to get me ashore that night. I was going to sleep, and if Sim wanted to get himself killed he could do it by himself.

I fell into my bunk at five o'clock that evening and slept for six hours straight. I think I'd have slept even longer except for something nagging in my brain: Sim, Sim, and I dreamt of him lying in the quiet moonlight with a bright knife in his breast.

I cursed, and swung my legs out of the bunk, looking across the foc'sle to where Sim ought to have been sleeping if he'd had any sense. But I knew that he wouldn't be there. I could see a cigarette glowing in the cook's bunk, and I asked him if he'd seen Sim go, and if he'd known what time he had to be back.

"That trash," said the cook. "He took his bloody accordion with him about seven o'clock, and if he doesn't come back on time . . ."

But I didn't wait for him to finish. I was in my dungarees already and I just slid my shoes on and took my cosh from under my pillow. If he had his accordion with him there was going to

be real trouble. It was as if he had brought his soul to her, bringing her his music, and a man in that state of mind can't watch his back in the dark.

I cursed him all the way up that hill, with my ears cocked for the ship's siren, and I wished I hadn't pawned my watch. It must have been near half past eleven, and the old man would be raving mad when I got Sim back. If I got him back.

I could see the one electric-light bulb outside the cabaret burning dustily ahead of me in the thick darkness, and I slowed down to get my breath. And in that moment Sim whispered to me out of an alleyway.

"Lofty," he whispered, "I knew you'd come." He lit a match and I could see blood on his shirt and a dark bruise on his face where someone must have hit him pretty hard. "They won't let me in," he whispered. "I wanted to play for her . . ."

"Well, you can come back and play for us instead," I said, wanting to kick him, I was so relieved. "Do you know you've nearly missed the ship?" I heard a warning siren going, which meant that someone was ready for the tide. "The next one will be ours," I said, and tried to catch hold of him. But he slipped back into the alleyway, shaking his head.

"I've got to see her, Lofty," he said. "I don't care how long I wait. I've found the door they have to come out of, down this lane, and I'm going to follow them." And as he said that our siren went, long and wailing across the darkness of the river and the jewelled town. I made a grab for him, but he turned and ran like a hare, his accordion swinging from his shoulder, the silver stops shining like fireflies as the starlight caught them.

Five minutes later the second siren went, and I knew that it was too late to catch the ship even if we ran together all the way down the hill. The old man wouldn't miss a tide for me and Sim, or for the Almighty.

I sat down in the alleyway and cursed Sim and his mother and his father and his unborn children until I was out of breath, and he just stood and listened to me, smiling a little, so that I could see the white flash of his teeth.

"You will help me, won't you, Lofty?" he said when I was quiet. "I've got to talk to her."

I took a swing at him, and missed, and then I laughed, because there wasn't anything else to do, and followed him down the lane. We found a crook in the wall where we could sit and watch the back exit from the cabaret without anyone being able to see the glow of our cigarettes, and waited for them to come out.

The moon rose, spreading a silver shawl across the darkness, and the lane became black and white: white stones, and black

doorways, and a fitted carpet of black velvet mud between the walls. I fell half asleep and dreamt of times when I had waited for a woman under a silver moon, and Sim crouched beside me, his arms hugging his knees, never moving except to light another cigarette.

And then they came. The low grumble of a man's voice, a girl's voice answering, the click of heels on stone, and the rusty whine of a gate opening. We doused our cigarettes and waited.

Which way would they go? They turned away from us, and after a long half minute we followed them, rope sandals quiet on the ground, our shadows part of the moonlight. They never looked behind them, the tall, gaunt, slow-striding man and the girl with her shawl pulled round her shoulders as if the summer night was cold or her heart was chilled. And after that first mutter of voices they never spoke.

Out of the alleyway into a wider road; up the remainder of the hillside and down into a quieter suburb, where old, pale-washed houses slept in their own gardens behind high walls and iron gates carved into arabesques. We slipped behind them from tree-shadow to wall-corner, and down the dark, uncared-for pavements.

It had been a rich district, and become poor, and in the poorest section of it the gaunt man stopped outside an iron gateway and fumbled for a key, while the girl stood indifferently beside him, looking at the ground. The gate swung open, the man gestured to her, and then they were gone.

The wall of their garden lay beside us, white in the moonlight, but broken here and there with black shadows where stones had fallen from it and had never been replaced. A magnolia tree with heavy, twisted branches crept along the top of it and spilt its thick-scented blossoms down on us, and behind the wall we could hear their footsteps on the pavement of the courtyard.

"Up onto the wall," I whispered, and Sim went up like a cat, feet in the broken places and hands on the magnolia tree, and I followed him, until we could both throw our legs across and see into the garden.

It was full of moonlight; a fountain in the centre, half silted up with silver leaves, and heavy purple bushes running wild, trailing their greedy fingers across the flagstones and the paths. There was a white statue with a broken hand, and a marble bench green with lichen, and surrounding this ruined elegance on three sides was the gaunt man's house; the walls pink-washed and faded, plaster peeling from them, and little black iron balconies guarding the upper windows.

It had been a mansion once, and in its decaying poverty I

thought I could see why its owner might take his child mistress, or even his daughter, to dance in the fat woman's cabaret for pesos and a meal. No one would know him there.

We watched them disappearing through a dark archway across the garden, and then the light of a candle suddenly appearing in a window, and a glimpse of the girl setting it on a shelf. We dropped down into the garden and waited for the candle to go out, and then for what we guessed was a half-hour longer, to give the man a chance to be well asleep.

It was stark mad, but by now I didn't care. I didn't even care when Sim unslung his accordion and began to play. Somehow it seemed the only right thing for him to do. He played very softly, moving slowly across the ruined garden until he was under her narrow, darkened window.

He played Spanish music, full of sadness and yet with the blood pulsing in its veins. And he played love songs, reaching up to her where she slept and waking her out of her dreams with the warmth of kissing. He played music to bring dead maidens from their graves and kindle them and set them dancing.

There was witchcraft in his playing, and God knows where he learnt it. Not in the orphanage in the sodden north that he came from, or the factory where they made bicycles all day. He could only have heard it in his blood, and as I watched him in the moonlight I saw for a moment the white roads long behind him and the gipsy firelight, and women with gold ear-rings dancing when he was born.

When I looked up to the balcony again she was standing there, her black shawl thrown round her slim white shoulders and her feet bare. His playing grew softer, as if he was whispering to her, and I felt that I shouldn't be listening to their music, and drew back into the shadows. And in a little while the fear went out of her eyes and she leaned over the balcony towards him, her long hair falling like a rope for him to climb. He put the accordion down then and began looking for handholds on the wall beside the balcony.

I shut my eyes and when I opened them again, he was gone and so was she, and the accordion lay there in the moonlight for anyone to see who looked out of another window. I stole out and brought it back with me into the shadows, and waited, the sweat running on my skin. Every moment I expected to hear the girl screaming, and to see Sim's body come over that balcony with the gaunt man's knife between his ribs.

Ten minutes, twenty minutes, and the eastern sky began to lose its darkness and the moon grew pale. And then there was a whisper from the dark mouth of her window and a bundle

wrapped in a shawl dropped softly onto the flags, and Sim after it.

He turned back and she came out on the balcony after him, dressed in a red skirt and her black shawl, with shoes on her feet, and in that second a door slammed, deep in the house. Maybe they had left it open and a draught had caught it, or maybe the gaunt man had woken by some instinct and slammed it in the anger of his running, but I felt the sweat go cold on me.

"Jump," Sim whispered, and she understood his tone if not the word. She clung for a moment to the iron railing, and I could hear swift footsteps on stone floors.

"Jump," Sim begged her again, and she jumped, sending him half sprawling until I held them both. He snatched the accordion from the ground where I had left it, and I slung the bundle over his shoulder as they started for the magnolia tree.

"Good-bye, Lofty," he whispered, but I didn't have time to answer him.

They were still climbing the garden wall when the gaunt man came running. I saw the long gleam of his knife-blade, and heard his breath sobbing in his throat, and all I had time to do was to stick out my foot. He went sprawling across the flagstones and his knife clattered against the pedestal of the broken statue and hid itself in the purple chaos of bougainvillaea.

They were over the wall, and I could hear them running, their footsteps swift and fading as they made for the open roads, and the gipsy firelight, and the life that he was born to. And she, too, I think, from the way she danced, and the way she came to him, like a bird flying from a cage into the wide sky. I knelt on the gaunt man's back and fumbled for my cosh, but even as I gripped it I knew there was no need. His hair was white, and he was crying as he lay on the broken flagstones of his garden, his old, thin body shaken with crying because his wild bird had flown.

Her running feet had vanished into the silence of the early morning, and I left him there and climbed the wall slowly, walking at my leisure down the golden hillside as the sun came up in splendour. And somewhere, a mile or so away, I knew that Sim was playing music for his Spanish dancer, and she was dancing for him on the sunlit road.

★ ★ ★

GORGING?

Nice to see cows
up to *here* in a meddar
Storing the wherewith-
al to make cheddar.

ROD MACLEAN

Waltz me around again, Willie,
around and around and around,

Then dress, then dinner, then awâkes the world!
Then glare the lamps, then whirl the wheels, then roar
Through street and square fast flashing chariots hurled
Like harnessed meteors: then along the floor
Chalk mimics painting; then festoons are twirled;
Then roll the brazen thunders of the door
Which opens to the thousand happy few
An earthly Paradise of Or Molu.

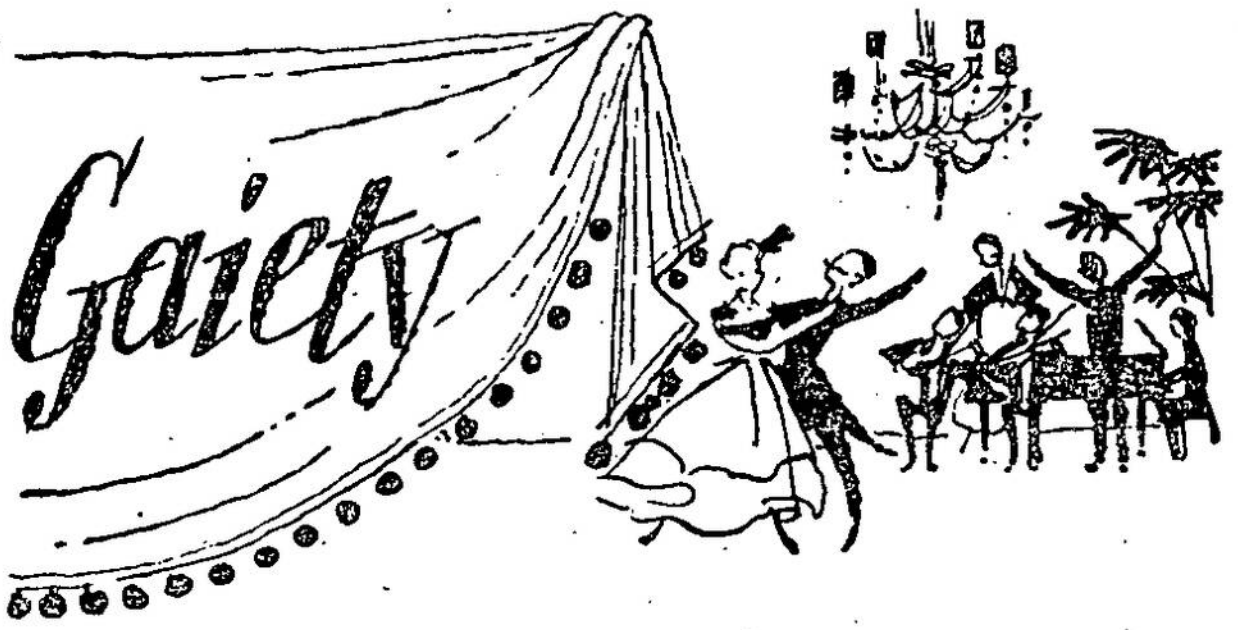
There stands the noble hostess, nor shall sink
With the three-thousandth curtsy; there the waltz,
The only dance which teaches girls to think,
Makes one in love even with its very faults . . .
Who, like Don Juan, takes an active share,
Must steer with care through all that glittering sea
Of gems and plumes and pearls and silks, to where
He deems it is his proper place to be;
Dissolving in the waltz to some soft air . . .

LORD BYRON, *Don Juan*

Musical Chairs

Now came an occasion for Dumas to practise his charm: the Whitsun Ball, great social event in Villiers-Cotterêts. This year strangers were going to attend—Laurence, Father Grégoire's niece, and Vittoria, Laurence's Spanish friend. Both were twenty and, it was rumoured, both were pretty.

. . . Altogether pleased with himself, he offered Laurence his arm. She was a fair and witty Parisian; her friend, Vittoria, full-bosomed and erect, wonderfully typified the Andalusian of



The music is dreamy, it's peaches and creamy,
Oh! don't let my feet touch the ground!

current comedies. He noticed that, having taken a good look at him, they exchanged smiles, and a blush mounted to the very roots of his hair. He took his revenge when they danced, however. The two visitors, surprised, had to admit that the little provincial executed splendid steps. When the orchestra attacked a waltz, Vittoria even discovered he was witty.

"You really waltz very well!" she told him with astonishment.

"I'm flattered—and all the more because I've never danced with anything but chairs." "What do you mean, chairs?"

"Yes! Father Grégoire forbade me to dance with ladies. So my dancing instructor put a chair in my arms."

She burst out laughing. For him it was the first time that locks of hair caressed his face, that he pressed against a yielding bodice and admired bare shoulders. Quivering and happy, he sighed.

"What's the matter?" asked Vittoria.

"Nothing. It's just that I find it far more pleasant to waltz with you than with a chair." At this she went and sat down.

ANDRE MAUROIS

Stay, Stay!

Never talk to me of waltzing it,
Giddily, O! Giddily, O!
'Tis a dance has many faults in it,
Giddily, O! Giddily, O!
First it strains our stays, in a thousand ways,
Whiskers much amaze, till your collar strays,
And you make a thousand halts in it,
Giddily, Giddily, O!

W. T. MONCRIEFF

Fast Tempo

DUCHESS OF BERWICK: Mr. Hopper is very late, too. You have kept those five dances for him, Agatha?

LADY AGATHA: Yes, mamma.

DUCHESS OF BERWICK (*sitting on sofa*): Just let me see your card. I'm so glad Lady Windermere has revived cards.—They're a mother's only safeguard. You dear simple little thing! (*Scratches out two names.*) No nice girl should ever waltz with such particularly younger sons! It looks so fast!

OSCAR WILDE, *Lady Windermere's Fan*

Palm Lounge

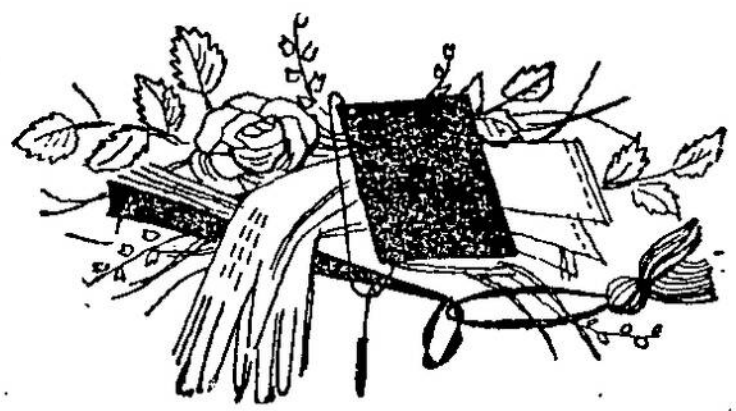
But when the wearied Band
Swoons to a waltz, I take her hand,
And there we sit in peaceful calm,
Quietly sweating palm to palm.

ALDOUS HUXLEY, *Frascati's*

Anniversary Waltz

I have a vivid recollection of the first time I ever heard a waltz played and watched it danced. I was a boy of thirteen or fourteen at the time. The scene was a ball at Government House in Poona. I daresay the orchestra was worse than mediocre; I doubt if the dancers were particularly expert. I had no standards to judge by. My taste was utterly unformed. But there in the bright-lit ballroom the dancers swirled before me; it was as if the figures on some beautifully carved frieze had come suddenly to warm and glowing life; the lilt and sway of the music swept into my heart like a flooding tide of joy. The lights that shone in that ballroom have been extinguished sixty years and more, and the dancers are all gone, but the memory of the music and movement has never faded.

The Memoirs of Aga Khan



HARRY BLACK

BY

DAVID WALKER

The Third (and last) Part of "Harry Black" opens at a moment of acute danger. Somewhere very near in the darkness of the Indian jungle prowls the dreaded man-eater of Rimli, implacable enemy of Harry Black, famous hunter of tigers and crack shot, who is only partially recovered from a severe mauling by the man-eater.

He had been nursed back to health in the Tanners' bungalow at Bondha, where he had recently met again his old friend and wartime comrade, Desmond Tanner—and Desmond's wife, Christian. Convalescing, Harry had discovered a new peace of mind—until the treasured memory of his love for Christian, as he had first known her on a brief wartime visit to Canada, once again became reality—a reality for them both.

Now new danger threatens: the pony, ridden by Christian's small son, Michael, returns terrified and riderless. Desmond is away in Calcutta. Harry sets out on a desperate jungle search for Michael, accompanied by Christian, now almost distraught. They are led by Bapu, expert native tracker of tigers, skilled in the ways of the Bad One, the man-eater of Rimli . . .

"SAHIB," said Bapu, "if the Bad One is here, the Bad One knows that we are here. Call, therefore!"

"Michael!" Christian called desperately into the night. "Michael, darling!"

"Michael! Michael boy!" Harry called—like a crow, it sounded.

"Quickly now, sahib!" urged Bapu.

Harry Black was not able to go quickly. His good leg and his bad leg did not serve him. But he went, leaning on Christian's shoulder. The torch beam showed the banyan tree, a giant, fifty feet across a base of trunk and bough and flying root, a strangler of the jungle, noble and grotesque. The path detoured for the spreading banyan. This was the place that Bapu meant.

"Tiger's here . . ." At long last, Michael's voice came from somewhere in the banyan tree. Christian's shoulder heaved at Michael's voice; it trembled in the hollow of Harry's hand.

Harry's horrors left him when he heard the sound of the boy's voice. "Right!" he said.

The beam centred to that sound as he brought the rifle up, as the tiger turned away into a gallop broadside across a gap in undergrowth, jazzy amber, jazzy black. He fired. He saw the quarters slew round. The tiger broke silence in the failing clamour of the shot. It roared, splintering the forest in the night. Many of the *janwar* called in witness to the fury of the tiger's passing.

"Hit him too far back and low," said Harry. "Well, I couldn't help it." He sat down. He was dead-beat.

"The Bad-One has gone far away," said Bapu. He took the torch from Christian, shone it at Michael up the tree, and went to the place where the tiger had been fired at.

Christian stood beside Harry. Her hand felt from his farther shoulder lightly to his face and to his brow. He rested his head against her. He was happy.

"Michael!" she called anxiously, "are you all right?" Her fingers played in Harry's hair.

"Tell us, Michael," Harry said. Tell me and your mother in the dark, he thought.

"My hip's awfully sore. I fell on it," Michael was whimpering, light and lonely. "I just saw the tiger beyond the tree, and then Adonis did a sort of shy full speed."

"Don't start there," Christian said vaguely. Her body quivered against Harry's head. "Start at the beginning."

"Adonis went slowly up a deep place to the bank," Michael said, "and I peeked over, and our crocodile was there, Harry—the one we saw by the river, an absolutely huge mugger on that sand. I watched him for ages, and then I was going to shout to wake him up but suddenly Adonis backed down and sort of spun and knocked my cap off with his head and I saw some men on camels coming in a line. They came galloping along this path and I was tired right out, and I seemed to see the tiger and be on the ground and be climbing a rope thing in the tree all in the same second, but perhaps it wasn't," said Michael and drew shuddering breath. "It's jolly lucky I can climb a rope."

Harry put his arm across and round the trembling curve to Christian's other hip. "It's all right now," he said to her. "It's quite all right."

"I hate it, oh, I hate it." Thrust and press and draw, Christian's trembling fingers played lightly and desperately in his hair.

"Bapu!" he called yonder. "Make haste, Bapu!"

"Then the tiger came." Michael shivered. "I didn't see it for a long long time. I heard it in different places round the tree, and once I saw it watching me, and then I heard the Bondha hooter and a car going very fast, and I remembered Harry said tigers don't climb trees much, but I was sort of pretty well scared stiff . . ."

"Go on, Michael!" The tiger could have jumped that height, let alone have climbed to Michael up the staircase of a banyan

tree. But this tiger had been fired upon by Harry from other trees, and time spent in reconnaissance is rarely wasted.

" Then it got dark, and I thought there was a light somewhere down the other way, and then I saw a moving light, and the tiger growled like a rumble very close, and I heard you call me, but I couldn't answer; then I just managed to. Did you hear me?"

" Yes, Michael," Harry said. Bapu was returning. " Help me up," Harry said to Christian.

But she did not help him up. She bent and found his lips to kiss them, and went away without helping him at all.

" Sahib! " began Bapu on arrival, the inevitable Bapu prelude, his introduction, day or night, in safety or in danger, *Sahib.*

" Tell me later of the Bad One's wounding. Tell me this now only. Art thou sure the Bad One has gone far? "

" Sahib, listen to the *janwar* speaking along the way to Rimli."

It was beyond the range of Harry's ear.

" I hear a chital," Michael said. His voice was almost normal. He had talked the first of it away now for the present, even if all his life he might see a tiger at a banyan tree. " Can I come down, please? " Bapu helped him.

Harry cupped his hands. " Cheddi Khan! " he called to his bearer. " Cheddi Khan! "

" Huzoor! " It came back, a full-throated Cheddi holler spanning the forest in the night, and Harry laughed.

" Forgotten you laughed like that," Christian said. She held the torch again pointed to the ground, and the light reflected up to let him see her staring at him, but he did not think she saw anyone or anything much at the moment.

" Come on," he said abruptly. Bapu led to the waterhole, not far off. Michael limped behind him. Harry followed Christian. They reached the *rao* and saw Cheddi's lights from the cars.

" Tell me now about the Bad One," Harry said. He was going short, but he could make it. He watched Christian, shoulders still, a small undulance of hips against the lights.

" Sahib," said Bapu, " I found a tuft of the pale inner hair. I found much blood. I found no bone. I think the bullet struck high in the right hind leg of the Bad One, not touching the other leg in passing out. With the great soft bullet this is a severe wound, but it is a wound from which the Bad One might recover and be lame. Sahib, this is my poor opinion only."

" Please," asked Michael, " please could we go and find my cap down near the river? I know exactly where it is."

" Sorry, Michael," Harry said. " Home now. We can get it later on." Later on? he wondered.

" You won't need it any more," his mother said. " You won't be riding ever any more."

" My proper velvet hunting-cap. It's a crash-helmet too. If I can't have that, I won't go home to England even."

" Now stop it, boy," he said. " Get in."

They went by the first fireline, then across the bottom of the

salient where he had seen a sambar hind that afternoon. Against the pale dry jungle rolling to him in the lights, he saw a tapestry of his imagination.

"You'll stay for supper, won't you?" Christian said politely through the mechanical whining of Harry's "Old Bitch" from beyond Michael in the left-hand seat. "Cold prairie chicken and potato salad, would that do?"

"Cold prairie chicken? Here?"

"Oh," she said, "I wasn't thinking. I should have said cold tasteless scrawny garbage-eating bantam from our nice bazaar."

Christian started laughing. No one else laughed with her. Johnson said, "I say, now, Mrs. Tanner." Cheddi tutted anxiously. "Christian," Harry said, stopping beside the Bondha car, "tell your driver to come along behind."

"You tell him. You tell everybody what to do. Oh dear, how funny!"

"Joke over," Harry said. "Now tell him."

Which Christian did, and sat quietly thereafter. They were part-way across the open land to Bondha when the "Old Bitch" gave up. She did this occasionally, full speed, full stop. She was a stout old car, weak in her electrical intestines.

"Bapu will hold the light," said Cheddi, "and I will make repairs. Sahib, you must go to Bondha and take food now for your strength. Also, the Lady Sahib is fevered in her mind and needs Your Honour's care."

My honour's care, he thought. I am not Uncle Cheddi to the goddess Lady Sahib. Yes, I will certainly go now to Bondha.

They dropped Johnson at his bungalow, and came at last to Bondha.

"My bruise is sore," said Michael, getting out, "but I'm not the least bit sleepy. I can stay up for supper, Mummy, can't I?"

"No," Christian said. "You can't stay up for supper."

"Michael," Harry said, "you're a good tough chap, but you've been a silly boy today. A spank and into bed's what you deserve."

"A beating, not a spank." Christian's voice rose to an hysterical pitch. "His father isn't mān enough to beat him. Beat him, Harry, go on, beat him."

Michael looked at them and ran away. He limped at a run, small and forlorn, across the verandah under the milling fan and into the bungalow at Bondha.

Harry went over to her. "You shut up!"

"I won't shut up." Christian was trembling with anger. "It's all your fault. We were happy till you came. We were. We were —Oh, Harry, what have I said? I'm sorry. I am so sorry, Harry." Shuddering, she fell silent.

Doctor Roy Chowdhury, M.D., bustled in with his small brown bag, a brown one, an idiosyncrasy of this small brown doctor. He darted a glance at Christian. "Sit down, please," he commanded. "I will give mild sedative to calm your nerves, one prick, the merest nothing, that is all."

" A sedative? " She stared at Harry, then at Doctor Roy Chowdhury, M.D. " No, thank you very much. I'm perfectly all right. But could you come and see Michael when I get him into bed? " Christian went away.

" I think she is all right," Harry said. " It seemed to happen just like that."

" Shock," said Doctor Roy Chowdhury, M.D. " What do we know of this? We know the chemistry, the physics of humanity, oh yes indeed, whole global poppycock and atom bombs we know."

Harry laughed.

" But the mystery of Mrs. Tanner snapping out of it by free will, now do we understand such things, tell me, Mr. Black, I ask you? Mrs. Tanner is brave Christian lady aptly named, though I am a staunch Hindu, of course . . .

" Now, Mr. Black, what of your gallant self? Let me examine you below the light. Disrobe."

" Not here," he said. Not here on the verandah.

" Upper clothing only, need I hardly say, to bare your manly torso, surely open secret. I would not have you mother naked."

Harry obeyed. He was clay in the hands of Doctor Roy Chowdhury, who much admired his scars, and inquired about ribs and head, all of which had ceased being troublesome. The new scars were all right, but he was weak; the old stump from his war injury had not filled out. Walking in dust and heat played hell with it.

" Your body is sound now but for this old tin peg-leg, as you call it mockingly. Your spirit, Mr. Black? "

He met the wise sad muddy eyes of Doctor Roy Chowdhury.

" I'm troubled," Harry said.

" Ready, Doctor," Christian called, and she came out. She laughed, her own gay laugh again. " What a place to choose! " But she stared then at his chest, and her left hand rose from her side and dropped. Christian was left-handed. " Oh," she said. " My poor Harry." Harry put his bush-shirt on.

" Drinks in the sitting-room," she said. " Will you have one? "

" I don't know." A drink was vastly needed. " What would you advise? " he asked Doctor Roy Chowdhury, M.D., who knew about Harry's jags and all the rest.

" Drink, Mr. Black, sparingly, is my advice. But if it must be large alcoholic tubs, then take the pledge now, once for all. Mr. Black, you are my hero absolutely."

Harry went into the sitting-room. It reminded him of what his mother used to make with plain things and jazzy things to set the plain things off. Here, reproductions of Cézanne and Renoir, a Jamini Roy, nice rugs of second quality, simple furniture of *sheesham,* tall flowers in low vases but the flowers drooped late in March, books and magazines about the place, a lived-in jumble of good taste adapted to the budget. It lacked the Tang horses and the good Bokharas and the jade. It lacked the cash.

I could give her all those things, he thought, to give me back the pleasure that I saw them give to her. Can I give them to her?

There was a gramophone, but they—she—never seemed to play it. He searched through *Oklahoma !*, *The Gondoliers*, *Rudolph with his nose so bright*, all the things he did not need and some Mozart until he found the fifth symphony of Sibelius, and put it on.

He got a drink and listened to Sibelius for a few minutes until the doctor left, and then he went to say good-night, sleep tight, to Michael, drowsy in his bed.

When he came back, there was a pink paper on the table. " Desmond's flying from Calcutta tomorrow," Christian said. " Then driving overnight. I'll have to . . . I'll send the car early in the morning."

" Any word about his new appointment? "

" ' Everything fine here,' he says."

Christian had a drink while Sibelius went on. Harry wanted more and almost did and didn't. " Oh, listen to the pizzicato leading to the other tune," said Christian—a thoughtful plucking of the strings, the splash of melody, splashing out of it full-born, a splashing witch of melody, and pluck again—" It comes just once," she said. " It never quite comes back. Supper's ready, Harry. Don't you think we'd better eat? " She stopped the fifth symphony.

" I didn't know you were a music person," Harry said.

" I used to be. It's a habit, isn't it, to be in and then get out of? "

They ate cold chicken and potato salad without conversation.

A mile away across the plain, Bapu still held the light, presumably, while Cheddi made a mess of the distributor, no doubt.

" If he doesn't mend it," Christian said, " what then? "

" I can't stay here," he said.

He looked at her and she looked at him. It was dark, but not too dark to see one another and to meet alone now on the verandah of the bungalow at Bondha.

" No," she said. " You can't stay here."

" That cap." He did not say Michael's cap, because he did not like to say it, and because of guile. " It must still be at the river unless someone pinched it. Shall we go and have a look? "

She stared at him. " Is that what you want, Harry? "

" Yes," he said. " That's what I want. What matters more is what you want."

" My wants? " Her face crumpled to the smile, gamine, so unexpected always in her thoughtful face, so startling now. " Would they be influenced at all by yours? "

He waited for her in the Bondha car. It was half past nine. Some things had happened since night began three hours ago. Nothing much had happened. What was she doing? Had she changed her mind?

" Sorry," she said, sitting away in the other seat, and they started, alone in the car together, " I couldn't hurry the ritual of what kind of eggs tomorrow morning, and I had to speak to the driver too."

He drove fast to the light where Cheddi worked away at what

he did not have a clue about. Harry was shy of Christian, not knowing what was in her mind with him, and the time for talk was past between them. " It's been a long time," Harry said.

" Yes," she said, " a long, long time."

" Sahib, after half an hour the ' Olebits ' will be ready."

" Good," he said. " The memsahib and I, we go to seek the cap beside the river. Wait for me at Bondha."

Time? What was time to Cheddi Khan and Bapu, half an hour or half a warm night through?

He turned left to the main road before the forest. He ran back with the lights of Bondha on his left ahead, then turned away across country to the river. No one else was abroad in the Indian night.

" You must be very tired," she said.

He was, and the throttle was in a bad place for his leg. " I am a bit."

" Let me drive then. Stay in, Harry, and I'll come round."

He stayed there, and she came round. " Well? " he said.

" Can't you stop asking me? "

He kissed her the first time for the blessing of their being together. Then they kissed one another. " Did you know you kissed me in the forest? " Harry said.

" I didn't mean to do it at the time. But when the doctor ordered sedatives, I remembered kissing you, and I thought: I'm awfully sorry, everyone, it can't be helped. But I'm not sorry. I'm not the least bit sorry."

" Chowdhury said that your snapping out of it was the mystery of free will."

" The mystery of more than I could bear. We tried. We tried so hard again."

" You did, anyway," he said. He moved over, and she drove.

" Too many things have happened to us—too many straws to the last one in the jungle when I knew you were afraid, and I was terrified, and you made yourself go on. I thought then: This isn't the man who couldn't take it when he failed. I just thought: This is my own brave Harry, and to hell with it, I don't care—Michael, Desmond, what I believe in. That's why I cracked up, I suppose, and said those cruel things, like *We were happy till you came*. Please forgive me, darling."

" It's true," he said. " The sad thing is it's true."

" You did try not to. You tried as hard as I did. You never like credit for being good. You don't believe in virtue, do you, darling? You look down on it."

" You helped me to go on this evening in the jungle. You, not me. How can I look down on virtue? Shall we stop again? "

" Gracious, no," she said. " There are limits to my powers of concentration."

" Do you remember," Harry said, " the things we talked about, my darling, that far-off day in Canada? I told you then I wanted you . . . ' We could have laughed together in the night,' I said to

you, but we did not, my darling. Do you remember my saying that?"

"You say the dumbest things sometimes for a clever man. If you remember, don't you know a woman would remember?"

"I don't know much about you."

"You understand every single thing I ever mean. That same evening after you had caught the train, my mother came into my room. She said, 'If you're going to be a true wife to Desmond, you must never see that man again . . .'"

"Go on," he said. "Talk to me, my darling."

"This once," she said.

He did not speak. He thought that what was said and done between them would be said and done for always.

"Desmond. Did he guess?" Would Desmond be surprised to know that I am taking his wife to the banks of the enchanted River Garda, and the moon is coming up?

"Perhaps at the very last. I don't know, Harry. He trusts everyone, me most of all. But he watched you drive off that last evening, and he said: 'There goes Harry Black. He likes to think he goes alone.' And Desmond looked at me as if he knew quite well. If he was mean and selfish, it would be less bad, this running with the storm. You do like to think you go alone, though, darling."

"Go alone away from you? God knows, I don't."

"For a confirmed atheist, you invoke the Deity a lot."

"Who said I was an atheist? For God's sake, don't start that again."

She sat back, with her bare arms straight to the steering-wheel, and laughed at him until he laughed at himself with her. The waning moon rose now to dim the stars. They had left the wheat behind. They came to sands between the river and the forest, a tranquil desert of the moon where life and love might trespass at their peril.

"Do you remember?" Harry said. Do we remember the first time we held a boy's hand or a girl's hand, the tingle and the shock of seconds into hours, of moon and stars marching their circular unending route? We are much older now, older and more wise and foolish, past the sweets of innocence, of holding hands. And this is the miracle: that we are not.

"You drive all right one-handed," Harry said. He was learning the other one, finger by finger, line by line, the wrist into the palm, the fingers, and the thumb, the soft strong instrument of hers for him to hold. "I can never close my eyes to see your face. But I can see your hands and think about them, beautiful and kind to comfort me."

"You devil darling," Christian said. "Let me have it back again." They crossed the *rao*. They had reached the place where the cap must be—hoofmarks into a gully against the bank above the river. She searched back from there and to the *rao*. He watched her. The lights were on, and the engine ran. She stood

in front in profile with the red handkerchief tied over her fair head, the white blouse at her breasts, the dark shorts at her thighs, the bare legs falling down away. " Are you sure this is the place? "

He switched off the engine and the lights, and went over to her. " Quite sure," he said. " I asked him again in bed. He said the pony backed out, and swung half rearing on its quarters. It must have been just here. It stands to reason."

" Oh dear," she said. " One of those awful things again that stand to reason."

" Don't worry, my love. It can't be helped. We might still get the cap back if the camel people took it."

" We won't. I know we won't. And people will think we didn't even look. I know what people are thinking about us."

" They aren't thinking anything about us. What does it matter what people think about us? "

" You don't care what people think about us. You don't care what anybody thinks. To hell with everyone is your motto, lone wolf having fun. But me? what about me? You don't care about me, do you? "

" I do," he said. Her mouth was near below his mouth, not reaching down, not reaching up.

She had not come to him altogether. " We should go home. We should. We should. Not even this once and say good-bye." But in a while now, standing above the River Garda, she came to him altogether. " We were wrong in Canada, thinking that not even a kiss was a wonderfully complete nothing to end up with. We're older now. So much has happened now for us to know."

His Enemy said to him: You know that nothing has happened to her for her to know. You know that she has known one man only, and you know she does not know. There is still time, Harry Black—Go away, he told his Enemy.

" You're strong," she said. " You're strong and hard against me. Darling, there's a rug inside that canvas-bag thing in the car."

Fireflies glowed and went out across the river. Jackals howled in the moon-secret land. The fireflies and the jackals, the glowing and cacophony beyond, the wetness of bodies touching in the heat, the wounded tiger in the forest, where was he?

" You make music with me. Such lovely tunes you play."

Ouvre ton âme et ton oreille au son
De ma mandoline
Pour toi j'ai fait, pour toi, cette chanson
Cruelle et caline.

" *Caline?* I don't know that."

" Cruel and caressing." And he wondered: Cruel?

" Not cruel," Christian answered for him. " Only cruel to remember music if you heard perfection once."

—We sail now to the island of Socotra. We sail for ever to the island of Socotra. The phosphorescence curls now, molten running shiver smash, and another wave is broken in the rising sea, in the cradle of our sea, rolling us and pitching us, lazy easy strong and slow, up to

Polaris riding off the Plough, down to Southern Cross athwart the sea. The ocean rises. Let us choose our wave, climb this first wave, let it go. The second comes, the third, the fourth comber of the monsoon breaking, the fifth giant and its trough, and mount the sixth to see our seventh wave the sailors talk about. It gathers us. It takes us in the phosphorescences, in the molten curl, sailing sailing, and two flying fish are flying, glisten skip and skim, ever flying is the moment of the flying fish, ever sailing, ever flying, ever higher, ever ever to the breaking of our wave, the thunder of our drowning on the rocky island of Socotra, here.

" Peace, my darling. Storms and peace I never knew about. Peace and not alone."

" Not lonely and alone," he said, " the miracle with you." He kissed her on her left cheek and her right cheek, on her brow, and they were quiet. Time was not before. Time would not come after. Time was not with them, looking at the sky.

Not until the watchman called again. The watchman knocked at the door of Harry's head to say that it was midnight by the River Garda, and he drove her home.

" I've always been afraid of India," she said. " Liking things about it, helpless in it, hating it. I wonder if your mother was afraid? "

" I don't think so," Harry said. " I don't know. That's a thing brave women tell their lovers, not their sons . . . My mother could laugh at me like you do."

" There's looking after you, and there's being your slave, to keep you in my heart for ever, even hurting me, it doesn't matter. Now I see why women live in shacks with husky drunks."

He laughed. " Not so husky at the moment, but a veritable drunk."

" No, darling, not a veritable drunk. You can beat that. I was watching you this evening. Was it nice, to be afraid at last and beat that too? "

" It put me in my place," he said. " I'm still afraid, and now I know." He saw the wounded tiger waiting for him. " I've learnt so much from you," he said, " about trust and other things I lost, my darling Christian."

" I don't know," she said. " I don't know any of the mysteries of sin and no repentance. Shall I repent this morning when I wake up to remember you with me? Just once, I thought. Just once properly this time to say good-bye, and be a true wife always after to my husband. It wasn't your fault, darling. I wanted it as much as you. But I was wrong. Did you know that I was wrong, lover of women? "

" Not any other woman," Harry said, and what he said was true. He was ashamed. He could not lie to Christian. " Yes," he said. " I'm afraid I thought I knew."

" *Cruelle et caline,*" she said. " And never a whole life for you. A part of life, an episode, and off to hunt that animal tomorrow, and afterwards another tumble would be very nice."

" Please don't," he said. " That isn't true."

" It is, my love," said Christian close to him. " It's true about you that you never give yourself."

" My old Colonel said that to me once."

" You live for Harry Black, and I am what you want, and the tiger's what you want, and please God help you with the tiger and with me."

" I've always had a one-track mind," he said. " I've never had a two-track mind before. I find it most confusing." His heart was full and penitent about himself and grateful. He kissed her as they bumped across the moonlit land of bund and ditch, cane harvested, wheat ripe now for the harvest. " The tiger is the episode," he said, " and when I've killed it, tiger's over."

" After that? "

" Would I come down to Dorset? "

" I don't know," she said. " I'm so ashamed and not ashamed. I'm me with you and you. Don't ask, my love. Don't ask me now."

They reached the road, ran down with the few lights of Bondha on their right, turned back. They came soon to the Tanners' bungalow at Bondha, where Cheddi Khan and Bapu waited with the " Old Bitch " ticking over to display a cure.

" The Lady Sahib and I searched long and carefully and did not find the cap."

" Salaam, Cheddi Khan," she said. " Salaam, Bapu. Sleep well, Harry." She went slowly up the steps.

" We will find the cap," said Cheddi Khan. " I will recover it this morning from the camel *budmash* scoundrels. My-kell must wear this cap upon his head when flying in the air machine. The Lady Sahib would wish it so."

They went back to Rimli. Harry Black slept well with love in the remaining hours of night.

Michael was riding round the garden, hatless, when Harry walked back to the bungalow at Bondha.

" That's fine. Now trot slowly, darling," Christian said.

His face was tight. He trotted.

" I thought it was best, Harry, don't you think, bruise and all to make him? "

" Yes," he said, " I do. That boy has guts—which is not surprising." He smiled at her, but she was watching Michael. He saw the shadow go across her face. He wished he had not said that as a compliment to her. Any remark was loaded except mundane remarks like: " You've taught him well. You ride very well yourself."

" I was a horse till I was seventeen," said Christian. " Shall we have tea? "

The tea came, and she poured it out for him and her. It was his own ex-best green tip tea that he had given them. " You've spoilt me for ordinary tea," she said, and bit her lip, and they watched Michael in the withered garden at a walk again.

" I was thinking," Harry said. " I was thinking the daffodils must be coming out at home. Haphazard, round about the grass, and under trees. Do you like them, too? "

" I like them best of all flowers," Christian said. " Carefree daffodils that die before the summer. You don't have to ask me what I like."

" I know, my love," he said. It was the saddest and the happiest thing he knew. " You've been with me all the time," he said, " ever since I left you, sleeping and awake."

She moved in her chair and did not speak. Another day was fading to another night.

" I must go," he said. He should have gone before this to see Bapu. There were numerous things he should have done and hadn't, and had and shouldn't have. " Shall I come back later? "

" Take Adonis round to the stable, Michael." She put the teacups on the tray. " No," she said. " You mustn't, darling."

" What are we going to do? "

" Was it true what you said to me that morning in your room at Rimli? "

Morning? He remembered bits about the afternoon. " I was drunk," he said. He did not look at her. " You'll have to tell me what it was I said."

" Wine mocks me," Christian said. " I can't tell you."

" When shall we meet? I've got to talk to you before you leave." But the tiger was between him and their meeting.

" Riding in the early morning is the only time."

" Not tomorrow," Harry said. " I'm on to this animal, I think. If so, it has to be tomorrow at the crack of dawn. But the next day? "

" Tomorrow wouldn't do in any case," she said, " even if you gave me top priority. Had you forgotten my engagement for tomorrow morning? "

" No," he said. " What time will he arrive? "

" About six. It was six before, and I guess it will be six again. Dear Desmond, what have I done to him? What will I do again if you crook your finger? What kind of a shameless woman am I? " She said these things quietly. There was nothing he could say to her.

Michael came through the house. " Harry, did they get my cap back from the oonty-wallahs? "

" No," he said, " I'm afraid they didn't, Michael. How would it be if I gave you a new one for a birthday present rather late? You could buy it in England, and let me know the price." Or I could buy it, Harry thought, in England.

" Gosh, that would be absolutely super. And Harry, I'm sorry for what I did yesterday. I'm supposed to say I'm very sorry. I mean I really am."

The three of them laughed. Laughing that time was good.

" Bapu didn't get his promised drink. Could you let me have a bottle, Christian? "

If she had suspicions of his solicitude for Bapu, she did not show them. " Of course," she said. " I'll get one. Or Michael could. Darling, run to the cupboard for a whisky bottle, and don't forget to lock the door again and bring the keys." She took a key-ring from the pocket of her dress.

" I'm going to buy it," Harry said. " How much? "

" Twenty-nine rupees twelve annas, but you're not."

" Listen," he said. " I can't . . ." The hypocrisy of scruple in a lack of scruple.

" A present from me," she said. " I'll put the money in the brown purse, that's for household. My one and only present to you." But she added: " Up to now."

" Presents," Harry said. " I'd like to touch your elegance with barbaric jewellery from top to toe."

" That would make me rather knobbly," she said.

There was lightness then between them, but he had another thing to say, and quickly, because he heard Michael coming with the least one of her many presents up to now: " Desmond is buying me that dynamite, which I think I'll need. Can you get him to send it with your driver first thing in the morning? Not bring it up himself is what I mean. The thought of . . ."

" I know," she said. " But the one thing he will want to do is take it up to you himself. What tactics would you advise me to adopt? Shall I play Delilah in barbaric jewellery? " She said that softly, blankly, and not bitterly, staring at him.

" Thank you so much, Michael," Harry said.

" You always seem to go just when I come," said Michael.

" The tiger's wounded, darling," Christian added gently. " Harry has to go. Let's wish him luck."

" I'll say it in my prayers tonight," said Michael.

He went his way to Rimli. Dust was his companion. He thought of daffodils in the pleasant land, in England. He had seen the spring in England twice since he had learnt beauty from a prisoner's book. His eye was strong for beauty now again, stronger than ever it had been. He saw the daffodils that die before the summer.

The lovers weep. There is no rest or pity.
There is no summer in that landlocked city.

Why should the lovers weep? Why should there be no summer?

" Oh Bapu, take one sup of whisky-wine; then tell me of thy doings; then take two sups of whisky-wine."

Bapu produced his aluminium cup from the recesses of his grey tweed jacket. It had a hole one third of the way up, which allowed for a fair good tot. No tilting to increase the measure was a rule that caused much Bapu merriment. " Level, brother," Harry said, as always; and as always, Bapu tilted from the hole. But he did not cackle merrily. He swigged it down and looked slightly less lugubrious.

" Sahib, I went by the Chilwa pool, by the five ant-hills, by the

great Haldu . . ." Bapu's description was of a half-mile circle midway between the ridges, midway between the Pass of Rimli and the rest-house. " The Bad One has gone there, and the Bad One rests there. The peacock, the langur, the kakar, and the chital, they and many others of the *janwar* say this."

" Hast thou searched elsewhere this afternoon? "

Bapu was squatting on his heels on the matting of the rest-house floor, swaying back and forward slightly on the fulcrum of his heels and toes. The rhythm of his swaying broke and then went on. " No, sahib. For there I heard the *janwar* speak and there I circled the speaking of the *janwar*."

" Oh brother, dost thou put thy trust in me? "

" As in no man," Bapu said. " The sahib has the hard way of the soldier, knowing death and having understanding. The sahib is a true friend, true to me when wicked men have said, ' Bapu is in league with man-eater. Bapu is never seen at time of killing. Bapu is man-eater personally.' Thus have they said in their wickedness and have wished to kill me. The sahib only is a true friend to me." A true friend, Harry thought.

" Also," continued Bapu pensively, swaying on his heels, " the sahib walks with the wild things in his heart. The high-born one, the humble one, the wild things have protected us. Sahib, I knew this from the first moment of our going into the forest, before the sahib had told me of his war journey through the jungles of the enemy to the wounding and the freedom. There has been beauty in this thing for me, and comfort in new days of trouble."

" For me also, Bapu, and I am but a child before thy wisdom. For me also there is the beauty and the comfort of this thing that we have known that all men do not know." Harry stood up and closed the double doors behind the unrolled screen, and sat again. " Oh Bapu, we are alone now in this house, and no man may hear us if we speak of secret things." Bapu's eyes flickered. He squatted, thighs flat against calves on his spade-ended heels.

" Bapu," Harry said slowly, " thou hast spoken of trust in me as in no man. But thou hast lied twice to me today. I saw the Bad One's pugmark at the pool. Oh Bapu, my brother whom I trust, why hast thou not told me long since of the secret place where the Bad One now lies wounded? "

" Sahib," said Bapu, " this has been a grievous thing to me, because in all matters of the Bad One I have told my knowledge truly to the sahib, excepting only this." The little man began to weep. He sobbed croakingly without restraint. Harry sat easy in his chair, his pistol in his trouser pocket. Bapu would neither run amuck nor run away now that he was weeping.

" Tell me of this trouble in thy heart that we may share it."

Bapu told him. His people built no temples, for the sky and land and water, the birds and beasts and men, the trees and flowers of the forest—these were the many temples of his people, and God dwelt equally in all of them.

They built no temples, but there were sacred places, places most

secret in the deepness of the forest, and the knowledge of the sacred places was the oath of manhood, secret and inviolable.

" Oh sahib," croaked Bapu through his tears, " I was an exile from my people, and always a stranger here at Rimli, I sought my holy place to be secret from all other men. I found this place where the red rock wraps the rock, and the passage turns in secret to the open place within the rock. Sahib, no man but I has known this place where I have worshipped alone with God. Sahib, eight cold weathers back, I went one morning to my *pujah* place which was trodden neither by men nor by the *janwar*, and at the entrance to my *pujah* place I found the pugmarks of a tigress.

" Sahib, it is a blessed holiness with us, that the greatest of the *janwar* should bring forth her little ones in our most sacred place, and thus it happened, and my heart was full of joy.

" I climbed the wall to look down upon that thing most sweet and beautiful to see, the fierce mother and her cubs, and this Bad One was the strongest and most playful of the three, the favourite of his mother. Sahib, they grew and went away. Only the Bad One stayed and grew to strength; and the Bad One's cubs were born in my place also; but in many of these seasons my sacred place was empty for my worship. In the April moon of the last heat, the Bad One was wounded in the leg, and only then, by accident and by the wickedness of cowardly men, did the Bad One become the Bad One.

" Sahib, in all other places do I hunt the Bad One and would kill him. But the Bad One has the safety of my holy place, and the Bad One waits for me. This I know. Also, in the telling of this secret, even in the telling of it to the bara sahib bahadur, my father and protector who has the *janwar* with him in his heart, have I betrayed my God. Does the sahib now understand my grief? "

" Brother, I understand this. Would thy god-in-all not say that the Bad One sins against the god-given habits of the tiger? "

" Sahib, this may be true." Bapu no longer cried. His cheeks were salted. He stared at Harry.

" Would the god-in-all not say that the lesser wickedness would be the killing of the Bad One in thy holy place? "

" Sahib, this may be true. The wisdom of God is hidden from us."

" This holy place of thine," said Harry carefully, " would be a rocky place within the wrapping of the rock? "

" A rocky place where nothing grows, most holy in the worship of all growing things in God, thrice holy by the birth and growth of the noblest of the *janwar*. For the tiger a cold-weather place. Even the inner cave grows hot within the rock below the midday sun; and the paw of the tiger is tender to the heat."

" Oh Bapu, wilt thou show me the outside of thy holy place? Wilt thou take me there tomorrow in the morning early? "

" That I will do, sahib," Bapu said.

" Is this a promise, Bapu? "

" Sahib, this is a promise." Harry stood. He put his hand on the tatters of the shoulder of the grey tweed jacket, part cloth below his fingers, part brown skin. Bapu in a closed and shuttered room was exceptionally goaty.

He took Christian's one and only present of the whisky, and poured some for himself. " Tilt well, then, brother," Harry said. " Let these be two mighty sups."

Bapu tilted the cup well.

Harry raised his glass. " *Sher bahadur,*" he said. " Brave Tiger, I salute thee."

Bapu wept again, and drank his third tot of whisky. " Oh sahib, I am an exile from my people, and I have betrayed my holy place. I know now why I long have known that the Bad One waits for me."

" The Bad One does not wait for thee. I will protect thee."

" Oh sahib, through these bad days there has been a thought of hope in me that I might go with my father and protector, that we might walk together in the jungles of the sahib's own land. But this is foolishness, I know."

HARRY put out his arm, in his dream, to put it round her, round Christian Black. He felt the cotton webbing of the *charpoy*, flat, tight, interlaced.

The long hand was at twelve or so, and the short hand was at five. He heard the water boiling for his morning tea. It was not particularly dark, but the glimmer through the shutters was the moon.

Through a strong dishevelment of forest to the river of the scarlet flowers, in Canada, her Canada, he walked with Christian's hand in his, with Christian's hand on him, with comfort not with passion. Lately now, still walking, he had given her a brooch made of a tiger's floating bone, the three-inch rudiment of clavicle, the curving bone, barbaric jewellery, and she was very pleased.

That was the reality, this godforsaken *charpoy* the illusion. There are limits, Harry thought. Dilly-dally, shilly-shally, not meeting things head-on. And he thought: You might think, from the way I have been going on, that this doesn't happen to a thousand people every day. It happened, for example, to one Harry Black.

The honest thing is that I can't do without her. The honest thing is that I can give myself to her to be a better chap because of her, although, no doubt, a bloody awful husband. The honest thing is that I am not ashamed of what I'm going to do to Desmond.

Desmond wouldn't take to drink. He wouldn't take a bullet to himself. I don't believe he would despair. He would go on being good, seeking the rewards of heaven. And is Michael going to suffer? No, he certainly is not.

Who's there? Who but Cheddi with the roaring Petromax and with the morning tea, with *chota hazri*, small breakfast of one banana, two digestive biscuits.

" Bapu has gone one hour ago, leaving this message for Your Honour: That he will await you at the Pool of Elephants at dawn, and in accordance with his promise."

" I told him to be here," he said in English.

" Sahib, it is not wise to place your trust in Bapu."

" Oh nonsense," Harry said.

" This is my opinion." Cheddi Khan went out.

Harry Black and Cheddi Khan drove slowly up the forest track, nearing a tryst with Bapu at the dawn.

" Keep the small rifle," Harry said. " Go back to the forest rest-house and there await the Bondha driver with the dynamite that Tanner Sahib has bought for me. Sound the horn on reaching here and wait."

Cheddi said, " Sahib, I am anxious in my mind about this Bapu. Let me come with you."

" No," he said.

" Bapu took the ancient gun," said Cheddi.

Harry stopped. " This also: if Tanner Sahib should come, do not tell Tanner Sahib where I have gone. Thank the sahib, and wait till he has left for Bondha. Then come thyself."

" It is understood, sahib. But I do not know where you plan to go. I know you talked secretly last night with Bapu. This is all I know. Your Honour, I must know where you will be this morning." Harry gripped the wheel against his old black tantrum.

Cheddi Khan got out.

" I am sad," he said—and Cheddi was not sad, but angry—" that after these many years you do not trust me. Therefore, Your Honour, I can no longer serve you."

" Don't be a fool," he said in English. But he got his temper back and wondered at himself. " Have I ever failed to trust you? "

" Never until now, sahib, and you are not yet strong, and there are troubles in your mind."

Cheddi's right, he thought. I needn't make a Bapu of myself. " I go to a place within the cliff, two furlongs from the pool." He pointed upwards to that section of the ridge. " To a cave where the wounded tiger lay yesterday. This was Bapu's secret that I swore not to divulge, but now I have told you, Cheddi Khan, and you will tell it to no other man. Is this a promise? "

" It is a promise. God be with you, sahib."

" And with thee, my brother." Cheddi ground the gears and went.

Daylight was here, subdued. He looked up-*rao*. He saw sunlight touch the Pass of Rimli. He looked down-*rao*. He saw the old moon pale above the forest, pale beyond the forest, pale to her at Bondha if she saw the moon . . .

Harry crossed the *rao* and climbed the bank. He had reached his rendezvous with Bapu at the semul tree beside the pool. Bapu was his second and his better pair of eyes.

There was a whistle up the tree, soft and mellow, but it was not

Bapu. It was a green pigeon. Harry did not try to see it. He looked round him. He was short of spittle, but he gathered some, put his index finger and his small finger in his mouth, made one abortive blast, then blew a whistle, anything but mellow.

No answer came. Green pigeons flew away.

The sun was breaking from the eastern ridge. There was beauty in the morning, and beauty is so brief a thing to grasp it while we may and lose it soon. He listened and he watched for Bapu.

He has never failed me, Harry thought. He made a promise to me. And afterwards he spoke of going to the jungles of the sahib's own country. How touching was that foolishness of Bapu's, that he would find his sylvan gods with me, and I am godless, and I feel sin in this way only: that I have made Christian sin against the God she loves.

He went over to the pool. In the crusted mud, greenish, seamed by a multitude of cracks, he saw pugmarks of the tiger. They were so fresh that moisture seeped into the indentations. An hour? He did not know.

Still no Bapu.

The nullah widened to a saucer of brown grass, a reservoir from which the nullah spilt. He had seen no pugmarks and no human footprints. He had heard no warnings. He did not expect warnings, whatever reception might await him. He saw no perspective-depth to fit Bapu's " rock wraps rock " and " open place within " description.

He would make a rustle in this grass. He did. The small birds burst out from his feet to whir in all directions and to settle.

His heart beat down again. He did not think that either Bapu or the tiger had recently passed here. He reached the upper limit of the grass, and stopped with open ground behind his vulnerable back.

Now he had to go into those boulders, jagged throw-offs from the cliff-face, he supposed, haphazard, higher than a man. He did not know whether he could get through. He did not know whether he could make himself go through.

He heard that tearing, growing rush, like a jet plane at a certain angle. The vulture pulled out of its superb stoop. It stood on all its brakes of air, and levelled fifty feet or so above the bottom of the cliff and close against the cliff and a short way to the right, up-ridge, of where he stood. The vulture circled, neck low, eyes questing inwards, downwards to a point. It flew heavily away.

Harry saw the place. What had been a streak of darker rock was now a shadow cast by early sun. What had been flatness was now depth. The sun cast no shadows into a broken cliff face in the middle of the day; the sun shone down from almost overhead, and hot rock shimmered blankly.

That vulture-stoop meant one thing only—food. The vulture had thought better of it. Why? Because something else was in possession of the food?

Harry's doom bells sounded now again. He heard his doom bells ring for Bapu probably, if not for him.

He moved on, picking a way past this rock, and round that, a cul-de-sac, back again, and try another passage through. He saw the last open space, the stunted scrub, the red cliff. He saw Bapu's ancient gun, that fearsome weapon bound with wire. Bapu's gun lay on the ground. There was a strip from Bapu's grey tweed jacket. There was blood. There were deep scuffings in the sand.

Harry stooped to break the gun. The cartridge case was empty. He put it to his nose. Fired recently.

A shot fired in the centre of the upper forest might be muffled by the smaller hills and vales. But a shot fired anywhere against the sounding-board of cliffs would ring and echo to every corner in the horseshoe. That set a time—the ten or fifteen minutes driving. How long ago? He had a watch—thirty-five to fifty minutes.

Blood led him. *Where the red rock wraps the rock, and the passage turns in secret* described it admirably. A slit entrance sideways and downwards in the cliff, not facing it, a U-turn within, a three-foot passage, tall and roofed, leading up inside an outer wall of cliff, and bending to the left to where the open place must be.

Harry stood within the U. He had entered by the right arm of the U. His rifle pointed up the left arm, which was flat, and the rock floor smooth and bloody. He was still not, perhaps, finally committed here. He might fire and scuttle out of the other arm, perhaps. He listened. He heard the asthmatic thumpings of his body engine. He heard human moans.

He looked up. It was quite an easy climb, twenty feet or thereabouts up a chimney of the inner wall to Bapu's observation point. The footholds were all adequate. He could lock the ankle so that the toe of his rubber boot would not yield to slip. It would have been an easy climb for him, but for adhesions in the right side of his chest.

Harry listened now again. He locked the ankle joint. He slung the rifle on his left shoulder, and he climbed.

He lay on his left side on the ledge. He felt better in a while, and was able to look crackwise down into Bapu's secret place where Bapu lay. Bapu's scalp was half torn off; one of his buttocks was no longer there. Bapu moaned, still wearing a few relics of his grey tweed jacket.

It was a circular sort of place, and in the middle of the open place within the rock, there was an elevation, a slab-topped chunk of rock. Below this and beside this Bapu lay. Upon this slab, or Bapu's holy of holies, were some objects—a pine cone from the Pass of Rimli, the golden feathers of a male golden oriole, a mound of pale brown earth, a clay vessel shaped much like a chamber pot, a few charred sticks—the living things of land and sky, the earth, the water, and the fire, he thought absently, his doom bells ringing, and his melody.

Bapu moaned. The tiger was not visible.

"Oh Bapu!" Harry called.

"Sahib," he answered, and stirred and moaned.

"Bapu, tell me this: where is the inner cave? Is it below me here?" Bapu moaned and did not answer.

"Tell me!" he boomed into Bapu's secret place, shouted brutally. "Is it below me here?"

"*Ha*, sahib." Yes, master.

He thought: The tiger cannot be dying if it dragged Bapu thirty yards and into there. I could drop a Barking Dog, of which there are four in my left breast pocket. That might bring the cruel unmentionable out from the inner cave below me, but it would certainly blame Bapu, and Bapu is not dead, and how do I know what Doctor Roy Chowdhury might not accomplish?

"Bapu!" he called again. "I come to save thee!"

But when he had called that down to Bapu, Weakness rose in him and said: *I cannot. I cannot go down into that place.* Weakness was clever, too. It said: *The little man is in agony and dying. To shoot Bapu is more merciful. Or I can wait here till the tiger shows itself.* But Strength said this in him: *Bapu gave his trust to me. Bapu moans down there, the tiger's mutilated mouse. I might save him.*

Harry Black went down. He unlocked his ankle joint. The bells of doom chimed loudly in the narrow place; but the witch of melody, the godly tune played too. This passage closed into a tunnel, not open to the sky as was the inner place. Harry had no room to turn the rifle. He looked round. He saw Christian. Her face was there just suddenly before him in the tunnel curving left to daylight. She looked at him with the look that he liked best, a clouded look she often had of having conversation in some quiet corner of herself, then smiling here again with him.

He was at the door of Bapu's secret place, circular in shape, a rough-hewn cylinder or pit, some thirty feet across, and in the centre of the circle was the squarish chunk of rock on which he had seen offerings to Bapu's gods. He could not see them now because the surface of that rock was higher than the level of his eyes. Bapu lay in against the bottom of that rock, quiet, breathing. The inner cave must be to Harry's left, and that was where the tiger would be waiting. He listened for the tiger, but he did not hear it. Bapu moaned again.

Two side-steps, bad leg leading, rifle ready as could be. The cave was dark. He saw blood on the rock floor at the entrance, dark against the pale red rock. The trail of Bapu led from here to where he lay. Bapu must have wounded the tiger with a lethal bullet from his ancient gun. A lethal bullet could be lethal in a lethal place. It lacked muzzle velocity—punch, impact shatter, stopping power, such as waited in two barrels here of his.

The only other place might be beyond that central rock, big enough, perhaps, to hide a tiger. Behind the rock, or in the cave. Blood at the entrance to the cave. Only Bapu's blood trail on the floor. The tiger must be in the cave.

He moved sideways, back to the circle of the wall, back protected by the wall, round the circle of the wall. But the floor against the wall was broken. Harry stumbled once, recovered. Nothing moved in the domed entrance to the cave. He heard nothing except a light moan now from Bapu, and then another. Was the tiger dead? Was it drowsy from a liver wound?

Harry had to leave the comfort of his wall. If he fell, and the tiger saw him fall, and there was any charge left in the tiger's battery, then Harry Black would certainly have had it. He could not manage the bumps and crevices of this unseen floor. He therefore crossed better ground to the protection of another wall below which Bapu lay, near the centre of old Bapu's holy place.

He faced the cave. He had one yard still to go when the tiger broke silence with a short, deep, world-consuming cough, and came from Harry's back, from in behind and round the corner of this rock. It came fairly slowly.

I really am a bloody fool, he thought, jumping for the lee, turning, firing the right barrel, or was it both, and the noise louder than the tiger's cough, and the stock of his rifle dug those same ribs of his, and he saw his prize Purdey rifle fly away yonder to snap in two against the wall.

He saw the unspeakable Bad One go on past him to its cave. He saw with clarity, with an odd sort of deliberate observation, that the tiger trailed a useless off-hind leg, and wove against a wounded off-fore leg. Yet life and hate burnt strongly in the tiger yet, snarling out of sight. It had not touched Bapu in its passing. It had not touched him directly. There was the tiger stink and there was the stink of putrefaction.

He now sat with Bapu's offerings, his pine cone and his golden bird, his brown earth and his chamber pot, the charred sticks and ashes of a fire, made perhaps a week or two ago when Bapu's Bad One was away at Ranipur below the mountains.

Bapu lay below him. He tried to speak. Please keep quiet, Bapu.

" Sahib, my promise—the Bad One waited for me."

He looked down at Bapu, at poor Bapu's scalp—the worst thing to look down upon. He faced the cave again. " Oh brother," Harry said, " I know this. Rest well, brave Bapu."

Bapu coughed below. The tiger grumbled in the cave.

" Sahib! " Bapu's voice was loud. He sounded like his own self. " My father, my protector. Let my bones lie on this rock within my holy place."

Bapu died. The tiger was quiet in the cave. Harry Black was quiet on this rock.

His doom bells did not ring. He sat here on this rock, which was his now just as much as Bapu's, here on this rock within the open place within the cliff within the confines of the Rimli forest, in the U.P., in the Indian Republic, a sort of member of the British Commonwealth; or think of it the other way, a sort of box within a box within a box and so on to the very smallest one, the very smallest fissionable box.

Harry had that random kind of thought: and time meant nothing much. He never had thought time meant much.

The tiger growled now in the cave, and it had moved, and he could see the front parts of the tiger. It watched him. Then it licked its off-foreleg. Then it watched him. He had fired blind and just too soon, and the tiger had smacked the barrels of his rifle. He did not think his scars had opened up. They ached a bit.

I was a bloody fool, he thought. I've always been a bloody fool. My good thing came to me at last. And did I grasp my good thing, to cherish and to hold? No. I had to satisfy my pride. I had to prove myself again, and kill Bapu in the process.

Fate knocks to say: You and Christian are my playthings. Yes, he thought. But Christian? What pain will my loving and my dying bring to her?

The tiger watched him. It neither growled nor licked itself. He knew that the Bad One would be coming soon, and that one useless leg, one leg a little weaker from an old healed wound, that these injuries would not prevent the Bad One reaching up to him and for him on his six-foot castle. He had a knife, which he would draw. He was alone, and not afraid now at his terminus. He thought of Christian, but he could not see her.

He heard a sound. Not from the cave where the tiger's face stared out at him; nor from the cliffs and sky above this pit where the wind was louder with the day; nor from Bapu's observation point; nor from the forest world without. The sound came once and came again, a footfall, stealthy, pad and pad.

It came from the tunnel entrance to this secret place, on Harry's left, half left from the tiger's inner cave.

How long since leaving Cheddi at the dawn? One hour, two hours, three? He did not know. The air was warmer. The sun did not reach in. He could not raise his head to see the strike of sun on cliffs above. Time now was every fearful second gained.

The tiger stared at him, ruffed head low behind the legs, the paws, the claws. He stared the tiger out. He might hope to stare it out, until something changed the balance in that brain, that imponderable, smallish, feline brain.

Movement touched the outer corner of his eye. His linked eyes swivelled for perhaps one half of one invaluable second, back again, no tiger in the frame of cave. Is it coming at me? Is it here already? But it had not come for him. The tiger had moved sideways or moved back. He saw blackness, empty in the wall.

Desmond Tanner had arrived, a lanky six foot two of Desmond Tanner; lemon-yellow, rather, in the face; carrying a rifle. Harry did not swivel eyes again. He knew that the next quick movement, touching his left eye, was a replica of a move of his before—quickly round the corner of the house. It was easier for Desmond, with Harry sitting up and staring there, to tell him roughly what was where.

Desmond moved out of sight. He stayed with Harry in his mind, with hopes and fears in Harry's mind.

He could not see the tiger. He heard Desmond coming. It would have been more sensible of Desmond, with two whole legs, able to negotiate rough ground unseen, to go on round the wall, his back protected, to come forward past this rock, one flank shielded and the tiger's cave still visible. Instead, he chose to do what Harry Black had done perforce—he crossed the open, some fifteen feet from where the tiger lay.

The tiger growled.

He heard Desmond breathing now. His breath hissed inwards round his famous sucking tooth, puffed out, hissed in.

Harry broke his yoga stillness. He held his left hand out to Desmond for the rifle, felt the barrels, gripped them somewhere near the point of balance. They were warm from Desmond's hand, and they were shaking somewhat from the shake of Desmond's hands.

He waited. Still nothing from the cave. "Get up," he said, and whipped the heavy rifle over to his right hand, to his shoulder, checked the safety catch, you never knew. A .423, lighter than his late lamented, adequate.

Still nothing.

"Sure it's loaded?"

"Yes," from behind him on the rock, croaked answer to a pretty bloody foolish sort of question.

"Howd's it shoot?"

"Two inches high."

The tiger growled, but still it did not come.

"Oh Tiger!" Harry called. "*O Sher!*"

A cough, and into view, and cough again, thunder-thunder in the circle of the birthplace of the tiger. He gave both barrels to the tiger. It thudded to the rock below him, thrashed about, lay twitching in the flow-away of life.

Bapu and his Bad One lay together.

Desmond was being sick.

Harry looked down at the Rimli tiger. He had hated it alive. He hated it now dead. He looked down at the corpse of Bapu. He had grown fond of Bapu in the two last moons of Bapu's life. He mourned poor Bapu. He looked up at the red rock walls of Bapu's dwelling-place.

Desmond shuddered. "A neat job you made of it. Look at those bullet-holes."

Harry did not look at the bullet-holes, smicky-smack between the eyes. "Thanks to you," he said, and handed over Desmond's rifle, butt first, polite in action and in speech, a proper gentlemanly bastard. Then he looked up at the sky.

The vultures wheeled against the dusty blue, not high in vulture terms, not in the deep black yonder, a thousand feet or so, but close above the red rock cliffs above this double prospect.

"You look like death warmed up," his old friend Desmond said without finesse. "Cheddi will be here by now. Why not go back with him? Just tell me what to do, and I can cope."

Harry stopped his dizzy gazing and came dizzily to earth. "Bapu made a parting plea about letting his bones lie on this rock."

"You mean he was still alive when you got here?"

"Yes," he said.

"Oh my God! I say, old boy, let's go outside."

"All right," he said. He climbed down from Bapu's offerings. A golden oriole—did Bapu shoot it with his ancient gun, or did he find a dead one?

The sun was high and hot outside.

"Bapu was an outcast from his tribe, and there are none within a hundred miles of here, and no one else will want to touch him. We'd better do what Bapu asked."

"Just blow the entrance in, you mean?"

"Yes," he said. "Now."

"Shouldn't we get witnesses?"

"That's a good idea," Harry said. He doubted if the way of Bapu's death would scotch the Bapu rumours.

"We'll need some chaps to carry the tiger to the car."

"No," he said.

"Are you going to skin it here, then?"

"No," he said. "You might send Cheddi up here with the dynamite."

Desmond looked at him. "You're sure you'll be all right?"

"Yes," he said mildly. "Quite all right."

He watched Desmond go to the tumbled rocks and seek a way and find it. And he thought, sitting in scanty shade below a thorn bush: The fact that Desmond came and saved my bacon, to use a Desmondish expression—that fact changes nothing but my estimate of Desmond. It doesn't change the situation in the least: It only complicates it. The world will say: *Thanked chap by running off with chap's wife.* The world can go to hell. It was all settled before this.

Harry had tended to waver weakly for a while in there, watching the vultures in the sky. He was strong again. "I'm sorry," he said aloud.

Are you thinking of me, Christian? I know you are, and that has been my help in trouble, and it always will be.

There were no signs of Cheddi Khan, so Harry got up carefully, that side of his body being sensitive. It would be a simple job, because all this rock-wraps-rock gaffuffle at the horseshoe entrance was caused by faults weathered down to slits and plinths that a sharp explosive punch or two would topple for ever and for ever.

He went to say good-bye to Bapu. The sun came in there now. Bapu's secret place was loud with flies, tangy with new death in the sun. The wind of day was strong above.

The sight of Bapu was not grievous, because this was not the old Bapu. Bapu of the graceful wave of hand, the throaty cackle, and the grumpy grunts, the sups of whisky-wine so delicately hinted at, the Calibanish Ariel, small genius of the forest with the wild

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things in his heart. Bapu had done his time and was no longer in this red rock wilderness. Bapu had gone away, leaving some things about himself that Harry did not understand.

Harry looked at the dead tiger, his last one and his worst one. It was an exceptionally big and heavy tiger. Ten foot between pegs? he wondered. He had neither shot nor seen a ten-foot tiger, and he would not measure this one. He thought old Bapu would have wished to have his Bad One lie with him below him in the cave which was its birthplace, because, you see, old Bapu had first seen the Bad One from that observation crack up there. No, it was right to leave them here together.

Everything was settled. " Good-bye, Bapu," Harry said, alone. He picked up the pieces of his rifle and left old Bapu's secret place.

Cheddi Khan arrived with fifty pounds of dynamite on his shoulder in its well-made wooden box. He sweated and was out of breath. " Sahib . . ." he began his apologia.

Harry raised a hand like a policeman stopping traffic. " Tanner Sahib came here and saved me. This thing is understood. Where are the detonators? " Harry was a fair-to-middling hand at demolition. He prepared one now.

Bapu lay with his pine cone and his golden bird, his brown earth and his chamber pot, his blackened sticks and ashes. The tiger lay near him in its cave.

Harry set caps to the two charges, linked them with instantaneous fuse, and that to the slow-burning two-minutes' worth. He lit the end and walked away. He had used the whole box of dynamite. He never did believe in doing things by halves.

It crumped. Commotion broke the sleep of noon. Some bits of rock flew up and fell. The hot wind carried off the dust. The jungle settled to the sleep of noon.

They went to look. " That's that door closed and bolted," Desmond said. " Trust you."

They walked down the nullah and along the *rao* and to the car.

" Cheddi can bring the others," Desmond said. " I'll drop you off."

Desmond was stating things, Harry noticed. " What about your job? " he asked, when they had turned onto the forest road.

" I hummed and hawed, my usual form, but it was such a wizard offer that I took it in the end." Desmond yawned. " You'll come over this evening, won't you, Harry? "

" May I let you know? " he said. " I'm a trifle washed out at the moment. Tired, that's all."

" I wouldn't wonder," Desmond said. " Come if you can."

" I thanked you, didn't I? " he said, going up the rest-house drive in dust and wind, a hateful day, not that a hateful day much mattered with the thought of England and the daffodils, and all decided.

Desmond stopped. " Twice," he said. " Hardly necessary. Have I thanked you for going after Michael the other night? "

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ANOTHER OF **NESTLÉ'S** GOOD THINGS

What was Desmond getting at? " I didn't know you'd heard," he said. " But . . ."

" First item of news this morning."

" See you later, then, perhaps," he said. He watched dust-devils swirl the leaves. *See you this evening, I certainly will not.*

" Don't worry, Harry boy," said Desmond. He smiled at him and went.

Don't worry, Harry . . . And did it mean: *I know*? Or did it mean: *I understand your sorrow about Bapu*? Or did it simply mean: *I am your friend*?

All that afternoon, deputations straggled up the rest-house drive. There were speeches. There were presents. It was quite a gala occasion. Harry accepted milk, butter, this and that, and goats.

The dreaded man-eater was dead. This terror of the Rimli people was now over. Their gratitude might seem effusive, but it was sincere, and must be met with patience.

Harry Black had many faults, but he was a man of grace with simple people. He adjusted the facts of Bapu's death to make Bapu the martyr of the piece, the hero who had sacrificed himself for them—which was anything but true. He told the tale of Desmond's courage.

He went inside the main room of the rest-house. He took off the garland of the forest flowers.

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Harry watched the parakeets, green against dusty green, green against brown and white, the long-tailed parakeets, the graceful birds at close of day, the purpose and the linked abandon, the tumble and the whim, the needled flight against the setting of the sun to roost where he would meet Christian in the early morning, and he would say to her: *My love, we tried our best. We're only human, after all. The thing that happened to us is a good thing, a thing so perfect that we must be strong about it. Say nothing now to Desmond. I will talk to him when you have gone. I'll say to him: Look, Desmond, this has happened.* And so on, say it out.

Desmond won't make a fuss. He won't complain. He'll say: *I know, Harry. I know you two were really made for one another.* Yes, he will say something chestnuttish like that. But his speculative look at me will mean: You aren't taking my wife from me to give yourself to her. You are taking my wife from me because you want her for yourself. You've never given anybody anything.

He listened to the jungle fowl, the crowing and the clucking like a farmyard there below him in the forest, cosy vespers of the jungle fowl, the ancestors.

It's true, he thought. All I have ever done is take. And what about those thoughts of mine of things ordained to happen? Wasn't it up to me whether I fought my fear? Wasn't it up to Desmond whether he came into that place today? Chance ordains that this or that will happen, that Bapu will be killed and I will not be. Chance ordained that I would come to Rimli, that they would be at Bondha, that I would be mauled by Bapu's Bad One; so on from there. But chance did not ordain what we would do about it. That was up to us. Or to be more specific, it was ultimately up to me. *My wants*, she said. *Would they be influenced at all by yours?*

So I deliberately put a seal upon her wants. I knew what I was doing, and I did it.

Such a charming way of saying thank you. Thank you for your kindness. Thank you for showing me some things I lost, and some other things I never knew. Thank you for showing me a father and a mother and a son, a family within the world to grace the world. Thank you, in other words, for showing me a little human dignity. It does seem sad, he thought, that the things the Tanners taught me in my time at Bondha are the very things I'm going to destroy. It's what you'd call ironical, to say the least. I found my truth, he thought. But I have sinned against my truth. Can I have sin confounded with truth?

It's up to me. Oh yes, I know it's up to me. If I was strong enough, I would pack my bags—or, to be accurate, get Cheddi Khan to pack them—I would pack my bags and then clear off for good and all, and never waken in the night to put my hand across to touch my true love sleeping.

But I am weak. I am not strong enough to go alone. *There goes Harry Black. He likes to think he goes alone.* He hates to think he goes alone. He cannot go alone.

There were lights beyond him in the Rimli forest—lights at the Katha place beside the *rao* where a comely girl had died, a victim of the man-eater—lights at the Taungya village. Lights at the quarters of the Ranger. Lights far away at Bondha where his true love thought of him. The drums were beating for deliverance. People sang and shouted, high and loud. The rhythm of the drums and the cacophony.

Harry sat alone.

If I had help, he thought. If only I had help against myself. If Gabriel would come to me as he came to doubting Joseph in the *Christmas Oratorio:*

Joseph: All I ask is one
Important and elegant proof
That what my love has done
Was really at your will
And that your will is love.

Gabriel: *No, you must believe.*
Be silent, and sit still.

Harry was silent and sat still, the child, the youth, the soldier and the prisoner, the faithless friend and lover, the lover all to no avail, no freedom for the prisoner.

He sat alone at this gateway in the red rock wilderness.

" All right," he said, " I'll try." He did not say that nicely.

" I don't quite understand," he said.

Of course you do not understand. You cannot understand with pride.

" I want some help," he said.

Then help yourself. You are a man, the highest of the creatures, and the lowest. You sinned against the truth you saw.

" All right," he said. " I don't know truth."

You know nothing till you give yourself.

" I'm listening," he said.

Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself . . .

" I know," he said.

No miracles.

" I know," he said.

And no rewards paid out.

" I know," he said.

And you know that the choice is only yours?

" I know," he said.

And you know that I am in yourself alone with you. Or I am not?

" I know," he said.

Then pray, my child.

He prayed.

The drums and songs of human celebration; the dement of jackals and the fever of the bird; the alarums and excursions of the jungle night. The sounds came up to him from Rimli. A rumour of the sounds came through to him from Ranipur. Harry Black was silent and sat still, and he was not alone . . .

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" Sahib, you are late," said Cheddi Khan with kindness.

" Yes," he said. " And we leave tomorrow in the morning early."

" The Lady Sahib said, ' Tell the sahib that I will come.' "

" Thank you, Cheddi Khan," he said. . .

He stopped the car. The sun had not yet risen, but the dawn was here. Cheddi knelt towards Mecca at his morning prayers, so Harry walked away from him and from the parakeets awakening in the trees.

He had reached his decision as to what to do by careful thought, strictly a secular decision. He was faltering. He needed help in the hardness of the thing he had to do. But he was alone again.

Oh God, he prayed anew, let me give myself that I may have the strength to do it right.

And he thought: I must play this scene in character. I simply have to be the me she knows, the me I am, me come to my senses, free from the duel of struggle and desire, Harry Black who weakened her against her will, the selfish he-man with the absolutes for everyone except himself.

Cruelle et caline, she said. *And never a whole life for you. Off to hunt that animal tomorrow, and afterwards another tumble would be very nice.*

The sun was up, and so he turned to meet the kindness of the morning sun, the dappled shadows and the shafts—and beauty is so brief a thing.

He waited at the forest gate.

He saw the dust before he saw the pony. Then he saw the pony. Then he saw the rider on the pony. Then he saw the golden woman cantering the pony. You know, he thought in the painful, quiet vision of his mood: Christian could ride a thousand miles alone in beauty through this India and she would never be molested.

" Good morning," they said to one another; salaams between Cheddi Khan and Christian.

" Shall we walk a bit? " he said.

Cheddi held the pony, and they walked away from him along the fireline.

" Are you going? " Christian asked.

" Yes," he said. " I think I'll go this morning." Then he told her. He told her very perfectly and well and in accordance with his character: that he was fond of her, most genuinely fond of her; but in the troubles of his getting better and the hunting of the tiger, everything had somehow grown to be more real and desperate and important than it seemed now that the job was done at last and the obsession over; and he had done some bad things in his life, and that was just the kind of chap he was, and fickleness a thing about him that he could not help.

The theme, implied but not explicit: I must be cruel to be kind.

He did it well, better even than his hopes and prayers, the nice philanderer, Casanova with regrets, but suitably ashamed, and

with the delicacy of a gentleman, not saying to a lady that he knows she lost her foolish heart to him.

"Have you finished?" Christian asked him, walking side by side, like a man and woman strolling out together, even through the daffodils, perhaps, in spring time, in the pleasant land.

"Yes," he said. He had said his say to plant the seed to grow the flower of contempt for him.

"Tell me something: Is this good-bye to me, good-bye to all the Tanners, and away?"

He wondered at the question, and he looked at her, and saw that she was weeping. The tears were slithering and slipping down her cheeks. Her voice was her own soft, sobless voice.

"Well actually, yes," he said. "You know what I'm like about good-byes." He looked at the brown grass and the dust before him.

"You want to do a good job, don't you?"

He did not answer, neither knowing what she meant, nor well able to endure her tears.

"Harry darling, there are three of us at Bondha, and love is many things."

"I did my best," he said. "I thought it would be easier for you."

"Dear love," she said, "I know you love me, and I know that love is not for us." She dried her tears.

They had walked, perhaps, a quarter of a mile, one Bapu furlong. They turned back.

"How do I look?" she asked him.

"Well," he said, "a trifle blotched, but quite all right to me." They laughed at that. They might laugh at anything together.

"What are you going to do?" she asked him.

"I'm going to Delhi," Harry said, "then to Bombay and catch a boat and sail the seas awhile. Then there are things in the world to do."

"I'll pray for you," she said.

"I'll pray for you," he said.

"Pray to God for me?"

"Yes," he said.

She smiled at him. "Now I can bear it," Christian said.

And back to Cheddi Khan who held the Arab pony named Adonis.

"Give us half an hour. It was fried eggs this morning, but we'll change to scrambled in your honour."

He watched her ride away. She had a good seat on a horse. *I was a horse till I was seventeen*, a Christianesque remark.

And then he said:

Sweetest love, I do not goe,
For weariness of thee,
Nor in hope the world can show
A fitter Love for mee.

He wished that he had thought of them before, but now he could not say the words to Christian.

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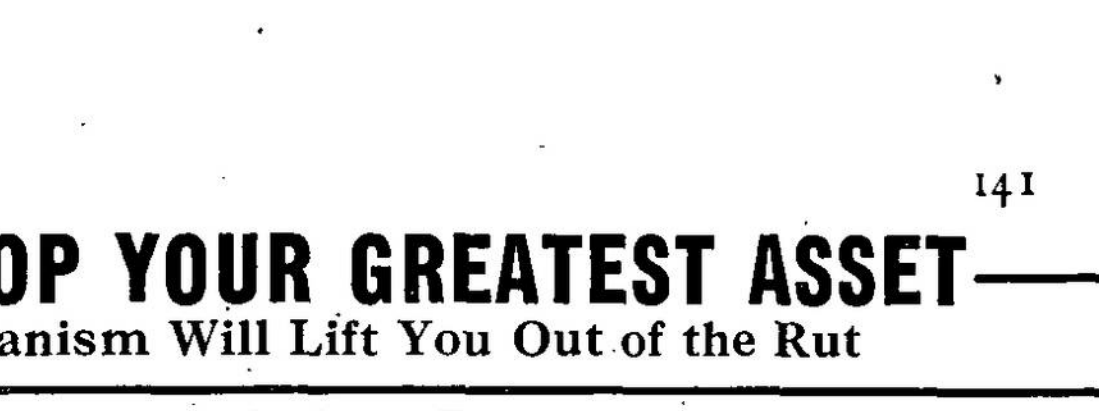

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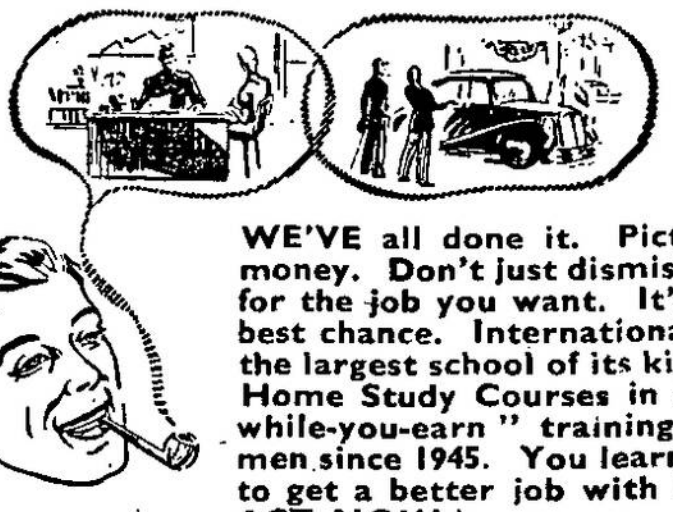

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" Oh sahib," said Cheddi in a monotone of pain, " is it farewell that you are saying? "

" Yes," he said. " And farewell to you soon, Cheddi Khan, my friend."

" Sahib, I will speak to my sons of you, of a man true unto himself, for my sons should know that a man comes to his strength through weakness and through sorrow. Sahib, is this not so? "

" Don't ask me," he said in English. The way to grace was long and hard.

He drove after the half-hour. Brown monkeys loped across the road. One child found a dried-up shoot of sugar cane, a dusty relic of that season. The monkey held it in its hands and nibbled thoughtfully before the car. He stopped. He could not see the monkey very well. " Silly little monkey," Harry said. " Buzz off."

" Sahib, let me drive the ' Olebits ' this short way."

" No," he said. " You're such a bloody awful driver."

Cheddi muttered to himself. " *Bluddi-ful*," he muttered. " *Bluddi-offle*. It is always thus."

Harry Black had scrambled eggs for breakfast with the Tanner family at Bondha. He parted from his old friend, from his young friend, from his true love.

He went to seek the world, and men were free.

" Harry Black," by David Walker, is being published by William Collins, Sons and Company

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Self-supporting*. 9, *Movable*. 10, *Trundle*. 11, *Hear*. 12, *Fired*. 14, *Quit*. 16, *Tot*. 18, *Walnut*. 20, *Baited*. 21, *Banquet*. 22, *Romney*. 24, *Girton*. 26, *Lap*. 28, *Time*. 29, *Bales*. 30, *Erie*. 33, *Erosion*. 34, *Textile*. 35, *Phosphorescent*.

Down. 1, *Somehow or other*. 2, *Love all*. 3, *Sobs*. 4, *Peewit*. 5, *Outset*. 6, *Tour*. 7, *No doubt*. 8, *Vested interest*. 13, *Rorqual*. 15, *Cubes*. 17, *Sat in*. 19, *Tay*. 20, *Beg*. 23, *Mammoth*. 25, *Turbine*. 26, *Launch*. 27, *Pewter*. 31, *Fits*. 32, *Axes*.

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Solution on Page 143

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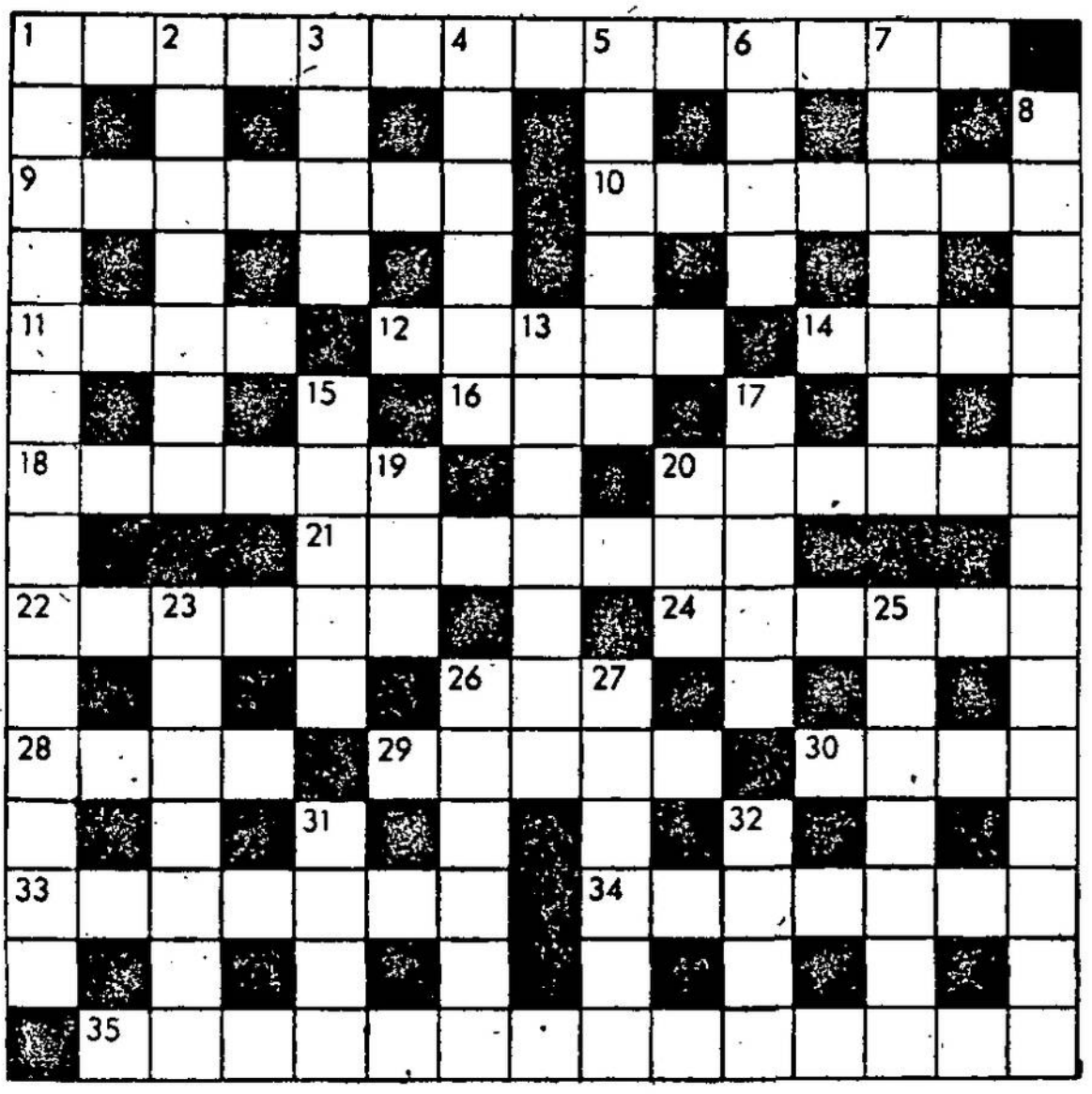

CLUES

Across

1 Independent of others' aid (4-10).
9 Mab, love, turn round (7).
10 Bed or bowl along (7).
11 This is repeatedly used on approval (4).
12 Pots and employees are finished off this way (5).
14 Rent paid in place of service (4).
16 A little drink, a little one (3).
18 Nut tree improved by beating (6).
20 Trap, not breath (6).
21 Sumptuous meal (7).
22 Did he paint the marsh ? (6).
24 Its residents wear light blue stockings, perhaps (6).
26 This dog is no Great Dane (3).
28 A good one is had by all (4).
29 Bundles of woe (5).
30 Lake, though not crimson, found in galleries (4).
33 Wearing away of love ? (7).
34 Get weaving to make it (7).
35 Chosen prophets are lit up (14).

Down

1 By various means (7, 2, 5).
2 Charitable precept for all tennis players ? (4, 3).
3 The boss is so upset that he is crying (4).
4 Alias lapwing (6).
5 Set out backwards ? (6).
6 It was grand while it lasted (4).
7 Surely (2, 5).
8 An Everest dentist makes sure of his tenure ? (6, 8).
13 One of the whales (7).
15 Solids contained by squares (5).
17 " Jumping from the chair she —— ——" (Leigh Hunt) (3, 2).
19 Scottish river (3).
20 Do it to differ (3).
23 Bygone Jumbo (7).
25 Machine of a revolutionary nature (7).
26 Vessel, or the start of its career (6).
27 Often taken for a mug (6).
31 Spasmodically associated with starts (4).
32 Cut taxes for further cuts (4).

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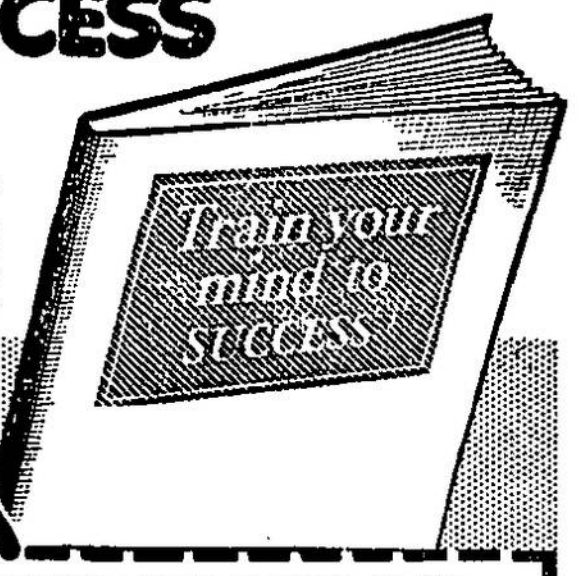

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